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HER WORD OF HONOR







““Oh, Henry! I’ve come to find you!”” FRONTISPIECE. See p. 284.

# HER WORD OF HONOR

BY

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY  
FRANK SNAPP

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# HER WORD OF HONOR

## CHAPTER I

**I** AM a poor relation. If you are one yourself, then I don't have to tell you what it's like. But if you're not, then you probably know no more about it than I did in the old days when papa was alive, and I was still Mademoiselle Elise-Florence-Marie de Vauquières de Clugny; with a chic little house on the Boulevard Malesherbes and a chic little dowry in the bank. Now I am "Come here, Lili!"

Not, however, that I intend to grumble. No philosopher ever grumbles, and I want to be a philosopher. Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius and Rochefoucauld all had their troubles, like me; but they all looked life straight in the face, and took what they got; and they judged things and people without prejudice or sentimentality or anything like that. They weren't thinking every minute about how shocked people would be, like Aunt Elizabeth and the girls; and yet look how

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they succeeded in life ! Now, I want to succeed in life ; so I have decided to be a philosopher.

The first thing for me to do, evidently, is to collect my data, and arrange them in a perfectly cold and scientific spirit. So let us be on our way.

### PAPA

If I can be scientific here, I'll know that all the books in my uncle's library can teach me nothing. For — oh, my papa was my dearest friend, and it's only fifteen months since he died !

Of course my reason tells me they're quite right, all the things I've heard hinted and said outright about him since then. He made his blunders, my poor papa. He was born the Marquis de Vauquières de Clugny, with three million francs' patrimony, a city residence and three châteaux. And he left behind not even a son to inherit the title : just a daughter that inherits nothing, — nothing, that is, but a few books, a bundle of old letters, and an old, old miniature set in a locket of ancient gold.

Not the miniature of my mamma, even ; no, he didn't even marry the right woman, the poor dear. When he was very young, hardly older than I am

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now, it seems he was engaged to an American lady that he loved very much. Then came the war of '70, and papa marched away to fight the Germans, and was wounded, and reported dead. So at last, when he made his way back to Paris, she had gone away to America with her family; and when finally he got news of her again, she had married some one else.

So years and years after, he married poor mamma — if she wasn't the same, at least she spoke the same language. Did she know she was only second in his heart, I wonder, or would she have cared if she knew? As she was English, probably not. That is, judging from the Englishwomen I know; for — oh, I never knew her! She died when I was a little, little child. But when papa died, it was not her miniature we found on his heart after he was dead; it was not her name that he said last of all, the very last — “Good night, Harriet.” My mamma's name was Florence Mary. But Harriet is the name engraved inside the locket with the miniature, and Harriet Wilson is the name signed to the old letters I found in a silver box in papa's desk, before the château at Fontainebleau was sold and I came away to England to live with my mamma's sister, Aunt Elizabeth.

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My aunt, who considers papa an immoral Frenchman because he lost his money, would probably turn me out of the house if she knew about Harriet's letters up-stairs. Is she right, I wonder, and was poor papa's life all a mistake from the start? Certainly it did not bring him much happiness. He was always melancholy; but oh, how kind and honorable and brave! If he mixed himself up in copper-mine schemes that he didn't understand, it was in the hope of doubling my dowry. If he let his property go, down to the very last sou, it was to keep his word to the friend that had persuaded him into the affair.

*Vauquières tient parole* — that's the motto on our arms, and that's what papa did. He kept his word, no matter what it cost. Aunt Elizabeth laughs at the motto, and says it's sentimental rubbish and bally rot, out of date since the Crusades. Possibly she is right; for, if we are to follow modern science and judge everything by its ultimate effect on the species, it's a fact that this motto, after eight centuries, has landed its last holder (in direct line) high and dry, a poor relation and an exile.

But to every dog, they say, the law gives one

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bite, to every horse one kick. So to every philosopher must be allowed one human weakness. And here is mine: With all my heart, I love the romantic traditions of my family, the splendid, unreasonable heroism that goes to the guillotine rather than beg for one's life, or to the bankruptcy court rather than break one's word once given. And — oh, with all my heart and soul, I adore the memory of my papa.

### MY VAUQUIÈRES UNCLES AND AUNTS IN PARIS

Whether or not they stand by the family motto, and keep their words, I really can't say; for they never promised to do anything for me, and certainly they never have. But they are all very chic and very grand, and at papa's funeral they all came in elegant mourning with the most expensive garlands. Since then they ignore my existence. So, instead of raising my temperature by getting angry, I will just ignore theirs!

### AUNT ELIZABETH

My Aunt Elizabeth is a thoroughly good woman, like all the other English ladies I have met since being here at Brent Castle. When she heard I

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had been left homeless, she didn't ignore me. No! I was her own sister's child, she said, even if I did have a fool of a Frenchman for a father; and she intended to do her duty by me, no matter how disagreeable it might be. Which was good of her, considering that my uncle, in spite of his chic name and title, is as hard up for ready money sometimes as I am myself. Racing debts, the governess told me; and she also informed me that this great, splendid château is plastered with mortgages, even if you can't see them, from the turrets to the gates.

Aunt Elizabeth is a Duchess — the Duchess of Porthaven. Though she is dumpy, and faded, and not particularly entertaining, they say she is the most important person in London society, next to the Queen.

Her aversions are Dissenters, old maids, unpaid bills, and papa; her ambition, to marry off her daughters.

## THE DAUGHTERS

There are six of them, — the Ladies Portia, Muriel, Ermentrude, Elizabeth, Florence, and Violet Beauchamp. Portia is twenty-eight and



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Violet fourteen. It is no use for a scientist like me to deny that they are mostly nose.

As their elder brother gets all the money and the estates when my uncle dies, it appears that the girls won't have a sou for their dowry. No one does, in fact, have anything for a dowry here in England. Whoever marries you must do so because he has fallen frantically in love with you beforehand.

It seems an odd idea, doesn't it, to expect so much from your husband — love and money both? So, when I look at the girls, poor things, in the long hours when I sit and talk French with them (two hours a day apiece!), I feel quite sorry for Aunt Elizabeth. And I try to be very philosophical with her for being so worried and disagreeable and snappish all the time. When you already have six ugly, dowerless girls on your hands to marry off, *Mon Dieu!* fancy how disgusting it must be suddenly to have a seventh one palmed off on you!

LILI (*that's me*)

Two big black eyes, like the pools made by a tipped-over inkstand; hair like the tail of a black

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trotter (or whatever it is, — the kind of horses they don't dock); skin dark like one of the harvesters that come up from the Midi in the autumn; and, as though that weren't enough, two cheeks red like those of a Norman fisherwoman! Oh, the nights and nights I have sobbed myself to sleep, at home and then at school!

*Noire comme une taupe* — it seems to me those are the first words I can remember hearing — whispered of course respectfully behind the back of Mademoiselle de Vauquières. But later, at the convent of Saint Veronica, I can promise you that the girls were not so delicate, — “Black as a fieldmouse,” or just “Mole,” short like that; at the least little bit of difference of opinion, that's the way they'd fight back at me. And for reply, what was there to say? There was not a girl in the school — except one from the *Île des Sauvages* — as dark as I. And — oh, there were two or three real blondes!

Beautiful, fairylike creatures they were, with pale yellow hair and skin white like snow — and oh, how proud they were! What did it matter if their figures were fat and dumpy like Aunt Elizabeth's, and one — the blondest of all —



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showed only two holes for a nose, like an ancient Hun, because it turned up so? But they were blondes, and that was enough. At the opera the prima donna was always blonde, and all the chorus in beautiful curly yellow wigs. The dark one, the growling contralto, was always in trouble all the way through, and killed herself in the last act. In the romances that I read (at home in papa's library, not at school, of course!), it was the same way. The heroine always fascinated the hero with the glimmer of her golden hair, and later on (about Chapter XX) always clasped him in her milk-white arms. But — bah! what hero ever wanted to be clasped in arms the color of *café au lait*? Helen of Troy was blonde. Harriet in the miniature was blonde like the wheat ears. All the favors of Fortune were for the blondes, so much was easy to see. It was the more provoking because in the mirror I could see quite plainly, if it weren't for my hideous "black as a mole," I really shouldn't be plain at all.

However, there was nothing to do about it, — except rice powder and golden bleach, which are not for young girls, — so I consoled myself, like every other ugly woman since Madame de Staël,

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by trying to be intelligent. Ah ! that went better. At school I enraged my tutors with the questions I asked ; at home I made dear papa's hair bristle even more than the white cavalry *brosse* he wore. When I came home from the convent two years ago (eighteen I was ; I am twenty now), I read every book that papa's library held. When we went to Paris, I copied the American girls we saw in the theater and in the Acacias ("Chic types," papa said, the Americans !). And, even though I may not succeed in being a chic type, at least I am not a little white goose like the other French young girls, — ah, no ! — for example !

And very lucky, too, since Fate has whisked me away from my dear France, where one's parents bring up a proper candidate for a husband at the proper moment ; then there is a chic wedding at the Madeleine and — *crac* ! there you are all established for your life. But here in England where it is necessary to do all that work yourself, to fascinate a young man (and a young man with money, at that), and to have him ask you for your hand to your own face, without your parents talking to him, or any preliminaries like that, — where you have to go through so much before you can

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even start life with a husband of your own and "Mrs." on your cards — why, the more experience you can have beforehand, even in books, the better.

But Lili, my poor child, of what do you rave? What can experience matter to you, who have no dowry for a French marriage and no beauty for an English one — if, then, that exists at all, the English marriage? I have heard my Aunt Elizabeth say a dozen times, with tears in her eyes, that there are no husbands left in England. It appears that half the young men go to the colonies and the other half marry chorus girls or Americans (those "chic types"!). And as for those who are left, if I may judge from the few specimens I have seen here at Brent Castle, they don't want to get married at all. They yawn, and keep up a sort of grunting conversation together about politics; and they pay little attention to the girls, and their tennis, and their tea, and their giggling attempts at fascination. And it is a fact that in all the two months since I have been at Brent, no young man, rich or poor, has proposed for the hand of Lady Portia, or Lady Muriel, or Lady Ermentrude, or Lady Elizabeth, or Lady Florence, or Lady

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Violet. And certainly no one has proposed for the brown paw of Lili!

It is disheartening, is it not? — when one considers what marriage is for a young girl: in itself an annoying ordeal, evidently, like those horrible examinations at Saint-Cyr that I have heard my cousins groan about; but necessary, necessary! if one intends to be a woman of the world or an officer of the French army. Ah! if there were some other way for a young girl to achieve place and liberty!

But there's not. And in England there's not even that. So I needn't worry. Or, if I do worry, it will be rather over the prospect I see stretching before me, of eighty long years (I'm so healthy, I'll probably live to be a hundred) here at Brent, braiding the tresses of Saint Catharine and talking French with the six girls, two hours apiece every day.

Oh, my husband, wherever you are, come and marry me! Bald-headed, double-chinned, loud-voiced, stupid — whatever you are, I'm sure you can't be so unutterably stupid as life here at Brent!

## CHAPTER II

**I** WILL hold on to the top of my head with one hand, and write very carefully with the other. For it turns, my poor head. *Mon Dieu!* how much has happened to-day, both inside of it and out!

Events, then ideas! I will set them down, the most important at the last.

First, then, this morning there arrived from Paris a package sealed and addressed to Mademoiselle de Vauquières de Clugny, in the care of the Duke of Porthaven. Inside it was more important yet, — two Bank of England notes, for a hundred pounds apiece, just five thousand francs; then quite a little box of gold sovereigns — another thousand francs, nearly. Never in my life had I seen so much money, all at once. And papa's old lawyer in Paris had told me I was poor!

His letter, which I found also inside the package, told me that here, after selling all papa's property, and paying all his debts, was the amount that remained. The letter was very apologetic, as

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though it inclosed about six sous. Six thousand francs! I am quite sure one can do a lot of things with so much money as that. Darling papa, wherever you are, don't worry about your Lili! You didn't leave her so poor, after all!

And so, thinking about papa, as I naturally did at the sight of this little inheritance, and perhaps crying a little, too, I didn't feel very much like going to the flower show at Brentpool that Aunt Elizabeth had promised to take me to that afternoon. However, she insisted. She said it was an informal, scraggly, parvenu sort of thing; that a person in the deepest mourning could go to without shocking people (as though that were what I cared about!); and that if I didn't begin to go around a little bit, people would say she wasn't doing her duty by her sister's child. Besides, it seemed that the new American beauty was to be there, who had been the rage for house-parties all this winter, and is to be presented at Court next week at the opening of the season. The girls were all enjoined to study her carefully and see if they could fathom the secret of her fascination. For it appears that, although she is quite poor (for an American!), every one is wild



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to marry her, and she can be a Duchess or a Marchioness or anything she chooses, any day that she condescends to say the word.

Aunt Elizabeth quite gnashed her teeth as she spoke of this intruder. "Why don't they stay at home and marry their own men, these American girls?" she inquired with tears in her eyes. "What on earth becomes of all the superfluous men over there is what I can't understand. Certainly, they don't come over here and marry *our* poor girls!"

So we went to the flower show. The flowers were certainly beautiful; but no one seemed to be looking at them very much. There were about five hundred ladies there, all dressed in the greeny blue and faded pink and dusty-looking white that Englishwomen seem to choose for their tailor-mades. There were, besides, about twenty-five gentlemen. Oh, how wistfully my aunt, and the girls, and all the other ladies, looked at them! But they weren't looking at anybody. They were all in a cluster in one corner of the conservatory, with their backs to the flowers — and to the Duchess, too. If I had been Aunt Elizabeth, I should have collected my band of

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ugly girls and come straight away. But she stayed and raged to the flock of satellite ladies — and clergymen — that swarmed about her. “It’s that American !” she exclaimed bitterly. “Now, that’s what I call an outrage !”

The American beauty ! I craned my neck ; but the wall of black and scarlet coats was too thick to give me a glance of the wonderful magnet that held them there. However, I had nowhere to go and no one to talk to ; so I had no choice but to stand there and wait and wonder what it would be like to be a beauty like that and only have to choose whether you would be a Duchess or a Marchioness for the rest of your life. What was she like, this famous beauty ? I wondered, — some marvelous, golden-haired creature, white and delicate like the hedges we had passed on our drive from Brent ?

Suddenly the crowd of coats parted, and they all started down toward the gardens where the tea-things were. And I saw her, the famous beauty, — black hair, black eyes, an arm that showed dusky against the trailing white broad-cloth of her dress. *Noire comme une taupe* — yes, black as a mole, just like me !



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If I had a shock this morning on seeing all the money that was coming to me, imagine, imagine! what a strange sensation I had at that moment! Was it possible, then — was it possible that — ?

There are some things that one does not recognize all at once or even understand. So I asked Aunt Elizabeth some questions while we were driving home, all alone in the great family limousine. The girls, who have an insane thirst for tramping, were walking the fifteen kilometers home with a fat little baronet and a consumptive millionaire from South Africa.

“Aunt Elizabeth,” I asked, “why do they call that American girl a beauty?”

“Don’t ask me!” snapped the Duchess. “You never heard me call her one, did you? Though I own — oh, yes, she’s the type that men go wild over, fast enough. Those big, meltin’ black eyes — how she rolls them, the snip!”

“Black eyes!” I cried. “But that’s just it. She’s black all over — black as a mole. How can any one see beauty in a type black like that?”

Aunt Elizabeth stared as she ruminated the point. “Blonde or brunette,” she replied, “what

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difference can that make if a girl's a beauty? Though this one is not — no, she's not!"

"Then it's possible," I gasped, "for a girl with black hair and an olive skin to be considered a beauty — a *beauty*?"

"Don't be a goose, Lili," retorted my aunt, peevishly. "I know your absurd Paris craze for blondes. But that's just because you're naturally a dark-haired people. Here in England blondes are a drug on the market. My poor girls!"

"What beautiful golden hair they have," I cried, "just like yours!"

The Duchess quite beamed on me. "Yes, poor dears, if only they didn't have quite so much nose! But they're all Beauchamp," she sighed; "and that reminds me — you made a great hit to-day, Lili. Of course I couldn't introduce any one to you, as you're not yet out; but several people asked me who was the beautiful little gipsy with my girls — Carmen, yes, that is what Lady Helena's husband called you. So I've about made up my mind —"

Me, Lili, called a beauty! The fascinating, fatal Carmen — I! My head turned giddy. I wanted to laugh and to cry all at once. What

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lovely thing was coming to me now? What had Aunt Elizabeth made up her mind to do for me?

“I have about decided,” she went on calmly, “that, in common justice to my poor darlin’s, I cannot expose them to such competition as their cousin’s. You see, I am frank with you, darlin’ child! And you saw for yourself how that Miss Carroll carried off all the men to-day — every one! Now, you look just like her — far prettier than she, in fact, or would be if you were properly dressed. Your hair is wavy and fine, where hers is coarse like an Indian’s, and you have a figger that is divvy, positively divvy! Yes, my poor love, you are a beauty of the most impossibly obvious sort, like the advertisin’ poster of an actress; and to keep you in the house would be to ruin forever my poor girls’ chances of a settlement in life. So, in common justice to them, dear child, I have just this moment made up my mind to send you away to the country.”

“The country, Aunt Elizabeth? But isn’t this the country?”

“Yes, at this season, my dear, when everybody is going up to London. I had half intended to take you, too; but now I realize it would be most

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unwise. So I leave you here with Portia — poor Portia ! Later, when the huntin' season begins and the castle is full of people, I'll send you to stay with an old cousin of your uncle's, — a dear old lady, quite deaf, who lives by herself in a magnificent old place in Norfolk, with a park ten miles around —”

“To stay — how long, *ma tante*?” I inquired unsteadily.

“Dear, affectionate child ! Sometimes you shall come home to visit us, I promise you. And when your cousins are all married, I'll take you up to London, and present you, and give you a season in town, all for yourself — won't that be nice, dear Lili ? With your beauty, what a success you will make and what a match !”

I sat quite still, frozen with horror. Six husbands with money to be found in this manless England, for six plain, priggish, opinionated girls — and till the sixth and last of these black swans was found, I am to be shut up in prison ! That house in the middle of the woods, that deaf, solitary old lady, — is that what my life is to be, all the years and the years and the years ? I can't stand it — no, I cannot !

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“What a color you have, my dear Lili,” observed my aunt, putting up her lorgnon with the most placid admiration, “like a crimson rose! And how your black eyes snap and shine! Yes, the true type of Carmen. And — Heavens,” she cried suddenly, “and there’s my darlin’ Stokeville coming home next week! Suppose he fell in love with you? The dear boy is so impressionable and generous hearted, — what a mercy I realized the danger in time! So I think, dear little Frenchwoman, we will pack you off for Cousin Lucretia’s to-morrow. And as I intend to invite Sir Frederick and Mr. Kluger to dine to-night, I think we must ask our little Carmen to stay up-stairs and dine with the governess.”

That night, after the governess had practiced her French on me long enough, and finally said good night, I sat late in my room and thought. My poor old G  nevi  ve, who used to be my nurse and then my maid, who followed me here from France, came in for a moment to brush my hair. It’s not often she gets the chance since she arrived at Brent. Aunt Elizabeth has taken her over to be maid to Muriel and Ermentrude —

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of course, a Duchess has a right to do as she chooses in her own castle ; but it *is* hard on poor old Gèneviève.

I explained to her in a few words that instead of going up to London with her and those ladies, I was going to be sent away alone, into the country. Never did I see any one fly into such a rage as Gèneviève.

“And does Madame the Duchesse figure to herself I will accept another sou of her money, to be separated forever from Mademoiselle ?” she cried. “*Bon Dieu des bois !* Let her go then and brush herself, Madame the Duchesse ! As for me, I’ve no more need of wages — I have my economies in the bank at Fontainebleau. And when Mademoiselle departs to-morrow, I depart with her. And if Mademoiselle takes my advice, we go, not to the cemetery where they propose to inter her, but to —”

Here was a new idea. “Where, then, Gèneviève ?”

“Back to France — to the moon ! How do I know ? It is for Mademoiselle to decide and I follow her — I, Gèneviève !”

A sharp knock came on the door. “Gèneviève,





*"Génervève gritted her teeth and went." Page 23.*





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what are you doing here? Lady Muriel is asking for you."

Géneviève gritted her teeth and went. But she left an idea in my brain, which somehow fitted in like a key with all the other ideas this wonderful day had brought me. I'm not poor. I've six thousand francs, all my own to spend as I choose. I'm not ugly; I'm a beauty — at least outside of my dear France. Turn my back on the prison they propose for me and run away with Géneviève into the big world to try my fortune — why not? But where, where should we go? Not to London, because Aunt Elizabeth herself is going there and she would soon find me and bundle me off to the old lady in the forest ten miles around. Not to my dear France, because my Vauquières relations are so sharp they'd catch me before a week was out and pack me off to Aunt Elizabeth's again — Aunt Elizabeth, who, after all, doesn't want me. For money is scarce, cruelly scarce, in this splendid old château, and girls are plentiful — cruelly plentiful. I'm a burden here, taking the bread and butter out of my cousins' mouths, and in danger evidently of taking away their husbands before they even have them.

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“Not Wanted,” — that’s the mark I saw on a pile of trunks on the steamer when I crossed the Channel; and that’s the mark that Lili wears, as plain as print, here at Brent. And at Lady Lucretia’s who can tell if it would be different, even if I could make up my mind to stand the life there? To spend all the years of my youth in the country, reading English books aloud to a deaf old lady, and counting the leaves on the trees — no, I can’t, I can’t! I’m a living creature, not a pink, bony statue like Portia and Ermen-trude! Aunt Elizabeth this afternoon called me Carmen. That’s all very good, but I don’t think I could ever break my word to any one the way Carmen did, and certainly she came to a bad end — but while she lived, she lived.

Ah, love and delight and passionate despair — ah, dancing and tears and laughter! That’s what life is made up of, not long, slow years of doing nothing and being nothing, petrifying before you’re dead, like Portia! No, I won’t stay — I’ll run away to-morrow!

But where? That was the question to which I found no answer. I opened my writing desk and took out papa’s miniature, the one he had made

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when he was a young man, the one I love best of all, and say my prayers to when I'm in trouble.

"Darling papa," I whispered, "nobody wants your Lili here, nor cares whether she is good or bad, alive or dead. They're sending her off into prison — oh, don't say she has to go! Tell her where thou wouldst have her go, my adored little papa."

It seemed to me that the miniature smiled at me — the dear old familiar smile. The tears came into my eyes, and as I tried to wink them back my glance fell — fell on the bundle of old letters that I had used to prop up the little portrait. There, where my eye fell, was written an address, in a delicate, old-fashioned hand, faded, but as plain as print: —

"14 East Tenth Street, New York City."

Of course I am not superstitious — I who am trying to be a philosopher. But those words came to me like an answer from papa, and I could not but take it as such. Harriet's address! Why had I never thought of her before? The lady who had known papa and loved him; and whom he had loved — oh, so faithfully! In all the

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world where could I hope to find a better friend than she ?

To be sure, there was the name signed to the letters, "She who loves you, HARRIET," and once "HARRIET WILSON," with the address as plain as any directory. And in her own house, would not her name be enough ? I took up her miniature and looked at it for a long time. How tender her smile, how kind her eyes ! Yes, I could trust her, of so much I was sure. If she had abandoned papa, it was all the chance of war and a cruel mistake. She would be good to papa's daughter, so much I knew. — Oh, Harriet, beautiful Harriet, be a friend to me, my one friend in this big, bewildering world, and I'll love you as my papa did !

When a drowning man sees only one chance of life, that chance does not have to be logically feasible for him to snatch at it. If Harriet is dead, or at the other end of the world, or if she is otherwise than the sweet angel papa believed her — bah ! I'll take my risk ! There's no danger of my being in need for a long time, with such a large sum of money to do as I like with. And after it's gone — well, then, I can work, and so

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can G nevi ve. I can embroider beautifully, and copy water colors, and even sing a little. Those are all things that people make money at ! And besides, over there in America, as every one in Europe knows, one gains money so easily that it is like picking up gold in the street. *Houp-l *, Lili, you need have no fear !

When poor old G nevi ve knocked at my door an hour later, to say good night, I seized her by the arm and dragged her in.

“G nevi ve,” I whispered, “come in — we’ll pack all night ! And to-morrow, instead of leaving for the country, we’ll take the early train for London. And Saturday, G nevi ve, we sail for America !”

### CHAPTER III

*M*ON DIEU! How strange it was, that crossing of the Atlantic, — from the first awful day when the sea suddenly stretched its empty blue circle around me, and the deck began to rise and sink again under my feet, and poor G nevi ve, leaning her head against the rail, cried out that she was dying; to the last day, yet more awful, when New York suddenly rose up out of the water, with its jagged line like a mouth with half the front teeth knocked out.

In between those two different days, however, things happened. When I say “things,” of course I mean Mrs. Ethelbert V. Cobb.

The first day, naturally, I was too ill to notice anything. The next day, however, I could not help noticing this lady that had so many people occupied with her all the time, — maids, and couriers, and stewards, even the commander himself in his wonderful, gold-braided uniform. Though certainly she didn’t look like an invalid: she was a large, powerful woman, laced into the



## HER WORD OF HONOR

kind of corset one sees advertised in *Illustration*, all straps and buckles for harnessing the fat over into another place from where it belongs. Her head wasn't bad, with the hair very nicely undulated and the face enameled; but certainly not pretty enough to justify the fuss that was made about her all the time. So, naturally, I understood that she had money.

The first day, though my chair was squeezed close up to hers, she didn't even see me. The second day the wind took my handkerchief — one of my pretty embroidered ones that I brought from France — and blew it across the arm of her chair. I turned to find her staring at it, with her pale blue eyes, which are prominent enough anyway, nearly popping from her head. A sudden thought went through me like a knife. "She has recognized the initials," I said to myself, "and it's Harriet!"

The next instant I saw that I had quite needlessly insulted my poor papa's taste. It wasn't the initials she was staring at, but the embroidered coronet above them. Having spent three months in England and seeing how people loved Aunt Elizabeth for being a Duchess, I understood

## HER WORD OF HONOR

what a coronet meant to this Anglo-Saxon lady. And, just to help along the good impression, I was very short and cool in my answers to her questions. Then I turned over in my chair and pretended to go to sleep with as calm a majesty as if I had lots of woolly wraps to wind myself in, like her, and several billion francs waiting for me in the bank in the unknown new world where we were going.

Though — oh ! I was freezing to death ; for how could a person who was the first one of their family in a thousand years to put to sea, think of bringing winter clothes with them in June ? And as for money — though of course I wrote back to Aunt Elizabeth that I was amply provided for, the fact remained that, after buying my clothes in London, and the two tickets for G nevi ve and me, I had less than five hundred francs in my purse. Who would have believed money could flow away so quickly ? However, soon we would be with the lady that papa loved so dearly and who loved him. So I pulled my white piqu  skirt down over my ankles and tried to pretend I was warm enough to sleep.

The next instant I felt a soft, warm rug drop



## HER WORD OF HONOR

over me, while another pair of hands wrapped a woolly kind of cloak about my shoulders. I opened my eyes—it was the two maids of Madame Cobb who were occupying themselves with me, while her two little dogs tinkled their bells quite neglected on the deck; and she herself was beaming at me, and holding out a glass of champagne.

“The best thing in the world for seasickness, dear child,” she said, “and you will forgive my maids for the liberty they took, won’t you? But these north winds are cold, for a little tropical beauty like you! And tell me—V. C.—are you the Mademoiselle de Vauquières de Clugny, Paris, whose name is down in the passenger list?”

I jumped at being so easily recognized; but, after all, the letters were of course the same. Fancy how well she must have known the list, that lady, to recognize the initials offhand that way when she just saw them embroidered on a handkerchief! So, as there was no particular use in denying my identity, I answered in a cool tone, like Aunt Elizabeth:—

“Yes.”

## HER WORD OF HONOR

“Ah!” Her blue eyes enlarged themselves, and she stared me up and down. “And I beg your pardon, but do tell me, is that an ancestress of yours, whose name one sees under that of Marie Antoinette, in the tomb of Louis XVI? And is he any relation to you, the Vicomte de Vauquières de Clugny, who is president of the Club of the Île de Puteaux?”

I answered yes to both questions; though as a matter of fact, Uncle Dominique hadn't been so nice to me that I should be very keen to own him. However, one can't deny one's family, and the droll thing was my new friend was perfectly delighted to hear I was the niece of the Île de Puteaux, and immediately opened a large box of marrons glacés, and told me I was the image of Lina Cavalieri, only prettier. (*Me! noire comme une taupe!* But it's certainly true that people *do* stare. I pretend to be annoyed, of course; but in reality, what joy!)

So, after that the voyage was pleasanter. Aunt Elizabeth, naturally, would scream at the notion of my making friends with a stranger; and certainly I must own that Madame Cobb has not that exquisite air of the ladies at Brent. She

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is very chic, so much cannot be denied, and clever as a Parisian market woman. Perhaps that is what makes the difference; she is almost too clever, too eager, too continually straining, you hardly know for what. Her eyes, though they smile, are always watching; her hands, generous and kind as they are, seem always ready to pounce. Pounce? How and why? Wherever, probably, they could get the chance. Just as they pounced on Aunt Elizabeth's card, the day after our first acquaintance. If her eyes had popped from her head at the sight of a coronet on a handkerchief, imagine how they bulged at nobility on a visiting card, and a ducal title, into the bargain.

"Do you know this lady?" she asked in a little voice, like G nevi ve when she speaks of France.

After all, why should I not tell the truth? I was not traveling incognito, and there was small danger of pursuit — alas! And besides, travelers with less than five hundred francs in the purse must stick the best foot forward and keep it out.

"The Duchess of Porthaven is my aunt," I answered.

*Crac!* There you have it, the turning point in

## HER WORD OF HONOR

my history, the ending of my old troubles, the beginning of my new ones. And even at the moment, one saw that something had happened that was out of the ordinary. Mrs. Cobb turned pink, and looked at me as though she were going to cry.

“Your *aunt!*” she said. “The Duchess of Porthaven, the Queen’s intimate friend!” she stopped short, and seemed to be trying to control herself. “I went about a little in London society this past month,” she said, “and I heard the Duchess talked of, quite some; but I never met her.” She sighed, and kept on gazing at me with an excited sort of look in the eyes.

What would have happened if the shaft of the steamer, or some other such thing, hadn’t broken about this time, I cannot tell you. However, something did break, and there we were *plaqués* in the middle of the ocean. The captain told us all about it at dinner, and explained that we should have to be patient a day or two till the tug he had telegraphed for had arrived from New York.

Some of the people grumbled. I didn’t, be sure of that! Already the ship had begun to feel like

## HER WORD OF HONOR

home, and the thought of New York frightened me a little tiny, tiny bit as we drew nearer. The ship had begun, in fact, to feel like something more than home, if my latest experience was to be taken as my standard. At Brent I was a kind of under-governess. Here on the ship, thanks to Mrs. Cobb's tongue, I began to find myself a personage! Who would have thought Aunt Elizabeth's name could have such an influence? The ladies, who at first let me severely alone, came up and gushed over me. The young men, who made eyes at me when I walked up and down the deck or sat at the table alone, were now brought up by their mothers and presented to me. And it's the Duchess here and the Duchess there, and the Drawing-room, and the Île de Puteaux, till I really have to laugh at the joke on my illustrious relatives. Whether they want to or not, they have to stand by Lili! The only vexatious thing is to see that, if this sort of thing goes on, the news of my whereabouts will get back to them, and then perhaps I shall be pulled back across the ocean again, like a bad little dog that has run away from the concierge who was giving it the air, when she gets hold of its leash.

## HER WORD OF HONOR

For it's no joke — I found myself becoming celebrated, in the most inconvenient way. No sooner had the wireless, which was always snapping and crackling on the upper deck, finally brought the tugs to our assistance, than they began to occupy themselves with me — fancy, with *me*, Lili! Every day I was interviewed; it appeared there were shoals of reporters on the vessel. Whether or not I ought to answer I didn't know; but Mrs. Cobb told me it didn't matter: what I didn't say they would make up, anyway. One thing, however, I refused to tell them, and that was the object of my voyage to America. "Mysterious voyage of a young lady of quality" — that was the way one reporter put it. No, Harriet was sacred, like papa. I was not going to tell her name to any one, even to Mrs. Cobb.

Whether it was this secrecy, or jealousy of what she called my success, it is certain that these last two days saw great strides in our intimacy. It was the day after the shaft broke, I remember, that she invited me to sit by her at table. The next day she invited me to tea in her suite, — a real little salon, all gilt and cupids. She stuffed me with large, fat chocolate candies till I was



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nearly ill, and showed me the miniature of the deceased Mr. Cobb, — a thin, sharp face, mostly chin. It appears that he killed himself by overwork, about five years ago, and left her fifty-five million dollars. She spoke about him quite indifferently.

It was not till the next day, when she invited me to move up from my dark little room on the lower deck to one of the bedrooms in her suite, that she began to speak of matters next to her heart.

First, a position in society, secondly, her son; those are her two passions. When she speaks of them, she keeps moistening her lips with her tongue, and her eyes shine just like the heroines of romance when they talk of their lovers (the novels in my Uncle Porthaven's library that I read without asking permission).

On the third day after the accident, when the tugs had arrived and the steel cables were tightening at our bow, Mrs. Cobb and I were already established as dear and intimate friends. And in the evening, sitting together in our deck chairs before her cabin door, she spoke to me again of her two ambitions. *Mon Dieu!* Think of want-

## HER WORD OF HONOR

ing to know certain people, and go to certain houses, as much as she does !

“ I'll get into the inner circle if I have to drop dead for it ! ” she said, and tightened up her jaw.

It appears, after her husband's death, she came to live in New York, and took a big white marble palace right in the most chic part of Fifth Avenue. But in spite of all her efforts, no one would know her. She subscribed to charities, and sets of lectures, and series of concerts, and all kinds of strange things like that ; but she never got invited to put her foot inside a single house — except by old friends from Montana who had come to New York to get into society like her, who no more wanted to see her than she wanted to see them. Now and then, every little while, one of these old friends would slip under the rope like children at a fête, and the other children outside would remain gazing after as she lost herself in the glittering crowd within, and asking each other however she had managed to do it. In any case, the poor little outsiders would know that never, never again would they see their dear friend more, unless they also managed to squirm under that rope and follow her. For Society, it appears, has



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among others this resemblance to Heaven, — that those who enter in never by any chance return to tell those left outside anything about it, and the only way to find out is to follow for yourself — if you can find the chance. And up to this date Mrs. Ethelbert V. Cobb had not found her chance.

For a philosopher like me it was very droll to see how badly she wanted the things that Aunt Elizabeth had, just as Aunt Elizabeth was racking her brains and pining for the things that Mrs. Cobb has. But then, what right have I to be patronizing? I call myself a philosopher; but I'm looking for a husband just the same! In fact, I think about him all the time, — the dull, fat, good-natured gentleman (all husbands are like that, if one is to judge from the romances) who is to make Lili *Madame*, and give her a box at the opera, and ravishing toilettes, and heaps of admirers, and all the other things the married ladies have.

I mentioned this one day to Mrs. Cobb. First she stared at me in a perfectly stupefied way; then the color came up into her face just as it did the day she first saw Aunt Elizabeth's card.

## HER WORD OF HONOR

She looked at me hard for a moment with those funny, prominent eyes; then she began talking about her son.

Oh, my good Victor! How much I knew about you before ever these eyes of mine were privileged to rest upon your perfections! What a sweet baby you were, twenty-four years ago,—blonde as the wheat, and pretty as a heart. What a wonderful boy you were,—so brilliant that if you had only applied yourself you could have done anything; but so sensitive that studying made you ill! Tall, handsome, distinguished, setting fashions in waistcoats and breaking the hearts of all the girls, it appeared that you were a boy to be proud of. Your one misfortune, indeed, was the envy that your superior qualifications excited all about you; your one defect, the ardent, unsuspicious soul that made you always the victim of designing persons if — at this point Mrs. Cobb stopped short, sniffed, and relapsed into silence.

A moment later, when the ship's telegraph boy arrived with a wireless, she jumped for him as though he had been the precious baby himself. The message, however, seemed to give her little satisfaction. A moment later it was crumpled

## HER WORD OF HONOR

into a ball and flung out of the window, while Mrs. Cobb was trailing up and down her little salon like a person in a perfect rage.

Suddenly she turned to me. "What am I to do about Victor?" she asked.

Now, naturally, as I didn't know Victor, and wasn't a mother myself, I found it rather hard to know what to answer. So I said the first thing that came into my head. "Wire him," I said.

"Yes," she answered; "but what?"

To that, of course, I couldn't make any answer; so I sat quite still, like a little mouse behind a trunk. Mrs. Cobb sat there with her eyes staring fiercely before her, and her throat muscles swelling inside the tightly wired collar of her expensive embroidered dress. Her face had a strange expression, as though her soul were uncovering itself; and suddenly she, of an age and race so far away from mine, and of an experience so different, she whose life mine had barely touched, seemed for the moment quite near and real, — much nearer than any of my own blood relations at Brent, who never showed their souls or even (probably) had any to uncover, except a little tag with "Ladylike" on it. It is true, Mrs.

## HER WORD OF HONOR

Cobb's face reflected no such tag: the expression of it at this moment was harsh and resolute almost to cruelty. Yet there was something in it that was pitiful, too; for one could see that her eyes were looking, not inward on her own affairs, but outward and beyond to some one dearer than herself.

And for the moment as I looked at her I realized that, in spite of being a young girl and a philosopher, I was a woman, too. And for the moment within my soul a shadowy vista opened, of mysterious depths that perhaps some day might wake to life and bring to my face, too, that look I now saw on the woman's face before me, — that look of wanting, *wanting* something so terribly; more than Aunt Elizabeth wanted money, or Lili a husband! Is that what it means to be a woman, I asked myself, — to want something more than one wants one's life, and know that never, never one will be able to have it? Then my thoughts passed like a flash; for Mrs. Cobb began to speak.

“I've done everything for that boy,” she said violently. “Lord knows he never had to ask me twice for anything he wanted; but now —”

## HER WORD OF HONOR

She gulped, clenched her fists, then came suddenly and sat down by me.

"It's no use," she said, "I've got to tell some one about it, and you, my dear, though you are so young, yet there's something so distinguished and aristocratic about you, you seem to me really like a relation. The first time I saw you among all those parvenus, I felt sure we were going to be great friends. And so, dear child, I'm going to open my heart to you."

She stopped and wiped her eyes with a handkerchief that was all lace incrustations, and so reddened her eyes terribly. Then she gasped, all in a rush: —

"Victor wants to marry a showgirl, out of a Broadway musical comedy!"

"Horrors!" I cried; though, to tell the truth, I had no idea what a showgirl was or where Broadway might be. However, it was plain that the young person in question was not at all the kind of daughter-in-law to please an ambitious mamma like Mrs. Cobb. The poor woman went on in the same despairing tone that Aunt Elizabeth used to use when she spoke of her children *not* marrying: —

"When I think of Victor throwing himself

## HER WORD OF HONOR

away like that, — he with all his advantages, so handsome, such a real little swell from the first ! Why, I counted on him, with all the Cobb millions, to make a really big marriage — a real splash. Why, I count on Victor, on my beautiful boy, to land me in the inner circle of society !”

*Crac!* the truth was out, like an eel out of a bag. It was not one alone, but both the darling passions of Mrs. Cobb’s heart that were at stake. Victor’s marriage was to raise not only himself, but his mother as well. No wonder she looked anxious, and bit her lace handkerchief to bits as she went on dramatically !

“Is this to be allowed ? No ! Now the time is come when I play my last card. Heaven knows how I just hate to do it ; but I must save my baby boy from himself. Fortunately, his papa left me sole heiress of all his estate. Knowing the boy’s ardent disposition, Mr. Cobb left him dependent on me for every cent. So now I have decided. I shall send him immediately an answer to this wireless of his, in which I set down my foot quite as firmly as he does his. If Victor marries this girl, not another cent does he get from me ; and at my death the Cobb millions all go,



## HER WORD OF HONOR

in a tight hard will that he can't break, for the Home for Incurable What-do-you-call-'ems or anything else, I don't care. Do you think I am right, my dear?"

"Yes," I answered enthusiastically; for I love to see people firm, even when I don't agree with them. And in this case I did agree with Mrs. Cobb. That silly Victor, mixing up his love affairs with his marriage in just the same impractical way that they do in England! In the back of my head an idea was forming itself — just the ghost, the shadow, of an idea.

"Then I have the approval of the Duchess's niece?" said Mrs. Cobb, with a magnificent air. "I'm sure I cannot be very far wrong. Will you be so very kind, dear Mademoiselle, as to touch that little button in the wall beside you, and I will write my wireless to my darling boy, telling him he will be cut off without a cent!"

## CHAPTER IV

THE next morning, before I was out of my bath, Mrs. Cobb came thumping at my door. "News!" she cried. "I've got news. Mademoiselle, come, I beg of you, come quickly and hear the news!"

So I scrambled out of my tub as quickly as I could, and wrapped myself in a pink silk wrapper that I had bought in London, — such a pretty one, not at all suitable for a young girl, all embroidery and little pink balls. I didn't even wait to brush my hair; but dashed right out into the salon. Mrs. Cobb was there, waving a sheet of paper with the ship's blue and red flag on it. She had no hair on, just a tight, sandy knob at the back of her head, and her face not even powdered. Yet for all that she looked almost young and more nearly pretty than I had ever seen her before.

"He's knuckled under!" she shouted, just like a man. "Victor's thrown up the sponge—the marriage is off! 'Twas the money that did it.



## HER WORD OF HONOR

He couldn't quite stand for being cut off, you see ; so now he promises to obey his mamma in everything, and never, never marry without her consent, if only he may have his allowance, poor boy, and the inheritance that his papa left him. Oh, I'm so happy ! My darling boy is saved !”

We ate breakfast together. Mrs. Cobb did nothing but congratulate herself on her baby boy's escape, and chuckle and plan for the future. I never saw any one so crazy with joy. She described Victor's character to me for the tenth time at least ; then she told me all about her own early life. It appears that she began life quite plainly, — her father had kept a kind of restaurant in a mining camp in Colorado, and she herself had been the mistress of a little country school. But then she married Mr. Cobb, and he made money — much money. So she had moved to New York, and last month to London, and a Countess, who had undertaken to present her in society, had taken her check and introduced her to nothing but a few scrubs and jays. What are scrubs and jays ? I was just planning to ask, when Mrs. Cobb suddenly gave a twist to the conversation and began tiptoeing up to what

## HER WORD OF HONOR

I had guarded always as forbidden ground; namely, my own circumstances, and my reasons for coming to America.

“Such a little beauty as you! I think your family were very brave to let you travel alone.” She felt her way along cautiously. “I suppose you know there’s not a young man on this ship that is not crazy about you; though what they’d say if they could see you like that I don’t know, with your hair loose over your beautiful creamy shoulders, and the little bare foot in the pink satin mule —”

I jumped. After Brent this was not at all the kind of conversation I was used to. However, Mrs. Cobb seemed to find it perfectly matter of fact, so I didn’t get angry, as I suppose Portia would have done.

“The really Spanish type!” went on Mrs. Cobb. “Those dangerous eyes of yours, and that vivid look! What a sensation you will make in New York — I suppose you’re going into society, my dear?”

“I don’t know,” I answered cautiously, “perhaps.”

Mrs. Cobb jumped straight at the point about

## HER WORD OF HONOR

which she had been beating for so many days. "By the way, Mademoiselle de Vauquières, you haven't told me who you are going to stay with," she observed, with the most wonderful carelessness.

This was a hard question; so I answered with an indifference that almost equaled hers, "With an old friend of my papa's."

My voice did not invite further inquiry; so Mrs. Cobb satisfied herself with only one more question, "But, at least, dear Mademoiselle, you will give me your address in New York?"

This much at least I could not refuse without arousing suspicion; so I answered, "Certainly."

"Ah! Then I shall come to call on you soon after our arrival, and I hope that this summer, perhaps, I may be permitted to see you at my house. Of course, I shall not be in New York; but I have a little place at Lenox, and a little cottage at Bar Harbor, where perhaps I shall see you. Ah! What a happiness it would be to present you to my friends — and to my boy!"

Our eyes met. And behind hers it seemed to me that I beheld, for the flash of a moment, the reflection of a thought that a few minutes since had been in my own mind.

## HER WORD OF HONOR

Rat-tat-tat ! at the door. The boy in buttons again with another wireless message. Mrs. Cobb jumped.

"What's Victor saying now?" she cried nervously.

"For the *young* lady," said the boy, and handed it to me. My hands trembled. I read the address:—

*"Mademoiselle de Vauquières de Clugny,  
Str. Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse."*

A wild idea came to me: it might be from Harriet! My fingers trembled as I tore the envelope open. Then I could have wept. This is what I read:—

"Come home at once. Return passage taken Str. Mauretania Saturday. E. PORTHAVEN."

The tears scalded my eyes. I flung down the message on the table and walked over to the window. "I won't go back—I won't, I won't!" I muttered under my breath, and clenched my fists together.

"No bad news, I hope, dear?" cried Mrs. Cobb, with eagerness.

## HER WORD OF HONOR

“Read the telegram if you like,” I answered miserably. Back to Brent, to talk French two hours a day apiece with the six girls — and not even Brent perhaps, but that dreadful château in the country with the old lady and the park ten miles around!

Suddenly I heard a little noise from Mrs. Cobb, — a queer little noise, deep down in her throat. I turned around. She had the message in her hand and was staring at it. She spoke under her breath: —

“It’s all true, then — your aunt — the Duchess of Porthaven!”

“Why,” I cried in a rage, “did you think I was lying to you, Madame?”

“Dearest Mademoiselle! Please do not be offended. Of course, I believe implicitly every word you say. But, you see, until I saw the telegram, I did not really realize —”

She stopped short, choked with emotion. Of course I could see easily that until now, even if she had not regarded me as an impostor, she had at least suspected that there might be something in those spinaches. For the niece of a Duke on one side and a Marquis on the other to be travel-

## HER WORD OF HONOR

ing all alone (Géneviève doesn't count!) and not telling where she's going — that's a thing one doesn't see often, you know! I didn't need any one to tell me that. So, for a person that tries to be a philosopher, it would have been ridiculous to get angry with Mrs. Cobb for having had some doubts.

I merely smiled then, in a grieved and plaintive sort of way. I remarked, "Poor Aunt Elizabeth!"

"Then her Grace," observed Mrs. Cobb, timidly, "is very fond of you?"

"She has often said," I answered with truth, "that she regards me as one of her own daughters."

"Ah!" Mrs. Cobb's answer was a long sigh, and she continued to gaze at me with eyes in which awe changed visibly to speculation, and speculation to open eagerness. What was in her mind? There was that look of paws ready to pounce which had struck me the first day I had met her. Ready to pounce, yes, like a cat on the bird in the grape arbor! In this case I had a queer, creepy sensation which told me I was the bird. But on which side would she pounce, and why?



## HER WORD OF HONOR

I am not easily disconcerted; but for the moment I own that I became rather flustered. "But I should like to know," I cried, "just the same, how she found out where I am!"

Then at the moment I remembered the newspapers, and the interviews, and the advertising I must have had in the ridiculous American journals. Of course the news had gone back to England, and Aunt Elizabeth had only had to open her *Morning Post* in order to have news of her beloved niece. Bah! how provoking! But I had betrayed myself all around. Aunt Elizabeth knew where I was, and Mrs. Cobb knew that I was a runaway.

"What!" she cried. "Then you left home without telling the Duchess where you were going?"

"Not exactly that," I faltered. "She thought I was going to visit an aunt in the country, and I — just let her think so. But I had always had so particular a desire to see America!"

"Ah, yes, I understand," replied Mrs. Cobb, with polite indifference; though one could see, in those watchful eyes of hers, that she did not understand at all, but meant to understand better

## HER WORD OF HONOR

later on. She looked like Destiny, waiting for me. I shivered and closed my eyes. Suppose, after all, I could not find Harriet?

For the next day, I saw little of my hostess. She lived on the hurricane deck, at the elbow of the wireless operator. When she descended for so long as to eat her dinner, the boy came dashing after her with a Marconigram. It appeared a great discussion was going on with dear Victor at a place called Atlantic City. How strange they seemed, those mysterious messages out of the void, making the face before me pale with anger, or red with triumph, or all screwed up with sharp, shrewd calculation!

However, she said nothing, and naturally I did not ask. I had my own concerns to think about, and they were pressing enough—Heaven knows!

Ah, the day when there rose up out of the soft blue water, the hard iron silhouette of New York!

The outer islands, with the lights on them, we passed by at night. Then we came very slowly up the harbor, waiting for the quarantine. All about the water was full as a tub is full of linen,—big ships, little ships, tugs, ferryboats, every sort of thing that could float. But it was not the



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number of them that confused me: it was the noise and bustle and movement. Everything had a steam whistle that never stopped roaring; and everything was flying about so quickly over the water, it seemed as though nothing stayed in the same place two minutes together. A stranger blinding thought came to me. Why had I come to America, hoping to find that a certain person had stayed in the same place for thirty years?

The look of the city itself, as I turned from water to solid land for consolation, did not tend to reassure me. With what a look of cruel strength it pushed itself up from the horizon, — not graceful and calm like Paris, but full of a strange energy that looked ready to swallow up all the life that should come near! Would it swallow up Lili, too? Or what would become of her when her five hundred francs should be spent, and Harriet perhaps nowhere to be found?

As for going back to Brent, that was impossible. Now that I had had my little taste of life, how could I ever bear the prison that they threatened me with, shut up alone in the country till my hair turned white and my teeth fell out like a poor old horse's? And besides, how could I face the

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disgrace of being dragged back to Brent like a naughty child, with Portia lifting her eyebrows and Uncle Porthaven cutting his jokes for the fun of seeing me turn red with rage?

No, I couldn't go back, I couldn't face that humiliation and defeat! No, assuredly I would find dear Harriet, and for papa's sake she would befriend me and take me in. Somehow, this idea, with New York a dream city on the other side of the ocean, and Harriet's love letters in my hand, had seemed very possible and practicable. But with New York rising there from the busy water before me, with its myriad stone towers and the millions of people swarming within and around them — how different it looked, how impossible and ridiculous appeared my childish hope of finding among those myriads of strangers the one particular person I happened to want! Within my heart something seemed suddenly to give way. "And I don't even know what she looks like!" I cried within myself. "I don't even know whether she wants me!"

I felt the tears come. "Lili, imbecile!" I said out loud. Then I could have bitten my tongue out.



“Come, my little lady, tell me all about your trouble!” Page 57.



## HER WORD OF HONOR

“My poor dear! What is the matter?” Mrs. Cobb’s voice was in my ear. I turned around. There she was, ready dressed for the shore, in a wonderful embroidered brown *crêpe de chine* and a chic hat. And Lili still in her white piqué! I felt all wrong, somehow, bewildered, and hopeless, and lost.

Mrs. Cobb saw the tears in my eyes, and in hers I saw for the fraction of a second the glint of the queer look I had seen there the other day — that keen glance of some one who sees before her what she wants and what she intends to have. With a wave of the hand she dismissed her two maids and the valet that was holding the two horrid little dogs. Then she dropped beside me on the sofa and said in a voice where the eagerness struck through the coo:—

“Come, my little lady, tell me all about your trouble!”

I hate to be pawed, I hate to be patronized; but in my position what choice had I? I remained silent, hesitating. Mrs. Cobb cooed in my ear:—

“Come, dear, tell your old friend all about it! There is yet an hour before the steamer can be

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docked, and Heaven knows how much time to wait for the customs ! So we have plenty of time for a little cozy talk. Indeed, for these last days, I have been making plans —”

She stopped short, with a keen, sidewise glance that seemed to read my soul. For the first time I noticed that she was as agitated as I. Her unsteadiness gave me courage. After all, why should I not tell the truth to my one friend ?

“ I am a little bit worried,” I said uncertainly. “ This is the first time I have ever seen New York, and I did not realize before — how very big it is. And the address I have for my friends — is a little bit old —”

She gave me another of her keen looks. “ What is the name ?” she said. “ Tell me, and I will place them for you.”

“ The address,” I answered evasively, “ is number 14 East 10th Street, New York City.”

“ Oh, my dear !”

Mrs. Cobb’s voice bristled with horror, as though I had mentioned the Batignolles. My uneasiness grew. Suppose (which I had never supposed before) that poor Harriet had sunk in the world, had married perhaps some very ordinary and



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common person, and would have no shelter to offer to a useless little charity seeker like me? Oh, I should have written before coming — I should have written!

“East 10th Street — I think it hardly likely, my dear, that the Duchess of Porthaven would be glad to have her niece visiting on East 10th Street!”

I was crushed. “I didn’t know,” I murmured miserably. Then an impulse of weakness came over me, to confide my perplexity to this one friend. “The address is an old one — I don’t know whether the family is still there or not. Perhaps they have moved away long ago, if you say it’s not a nice street —”

My voice trailed away in a tremble that I hated myself for, but could not help. Suddenly I felt Mrs. Cobb’s hand grasp mine and her voice with sudden firmness in my ear. With a few brief, businesslike questions she had the truth of my situation from me, as I should hardly have dared to state it to myself. Then she got up and took one or two turns up and down the tiny salon. I sat silent, thinking of the day after papa’s funeral, when G  nevi  ve and I left Fontaine-



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bleau. Even for me who try to be a philosopher there are times when life seems almost too sad.

Suddenly, with a bounce, Mrs. Cobb came and seated herself by my side. "My dear, I think we have been beating about the bush long enough. Let us be frank with each other. It begins to look to me as though you might have need of what I can do for you. I frankly own to you, I have need of what you can do for me. Shall we try and make a bargain?"

I held tight to my seat. It seemed to me I knew already what was coming.

"These last two days," went on Mrs. Cobb, firmly, "I have, as you doubtless have noticed, been corresponding a great deal with my son. I have, in fact, brought him to terms. By threatening to cut him off from all inheritance, I have stopped a marriage that would have been his ruin. By offering to settle on him outright and immediately one half of the sum that his father left to me, I have obtained his consent to a marriage of my choosing. My dear, how would you like to be my daughter?"

## CHAPTER V

**W**AS I expecting such a question ? Perhaps ; but nevertheless my head whirled. My husband ! Was it possible, before I had foot in the new world, that I had already found you ?

“ Dear Madame ! what do you mean ? ” I cried in confusion. For really, when it came to the point, it was a little bit embarrassing for a young girl to have to manage her marriage all by herself, without an intermediary or anything.

For answer Mrs. Cobb took up a heavy silver frame from the table and showed me a picture inside. I will confess my hand trembled a little bit as I took it up and looked at it. A very blonde, straight-featured, blue-eyed young man was what I saw, — if he had only not been clean-shaven, he might have been the same pretty boy that poses for the picture postcards in the railway stations. In fact, my impression of him was something less than nothing, — neither good nor bad, nor anything very much ; in short, an ideal husband !

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“The dear boy!” said Mrs. Cobb, fondly regarding the miniature. “So aristocratic, isn’t he? Since he was able to speak, always the real little swell! His skin is so sensitive he never can wear but one kind of silk underwear, woven to order by hand. And as for photographs, he won’t even sit down before a camera; he says they’re too common. So this miniature, as you see, is all I have of my pet, — except a large full-length portrait by Chartran, that hangs in our cottage at Bar Harbor. Well, dear, what do you say?”

Just why, for a simple business affair like my marriage, I should have been so embarrassed, I really cannot tell you. Here was the object of my life, as of every well-regulated young girl’s, attained in a manner that Aunt Elizabeth despaired of, and that Harriet herself probably might not have been able to do for me. Without a dowry, without even the embarrassing preliminaries of falling in love, here I was offered a name, position, and millions. If Cobb was not much of a name beside Vauquières de Clugny, at least its respectability was vouched for by the deep reverence the captain of this great ship showed to

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the lady who now offered the name to me. I thought of my poor little purse with its less than five hundred francs inside; then I thought of the diamonds, the automobiles, the Doucet frocks, and the way Aunt Elizabeth and the girls would stare. Yet somehow there was no triumph in the thought. I was sad; sad almost as the day I left Fontainebleau and stood as to-day on the brink of the unknown.

"I don't know," I faltered. "Thank you so much, Madame, for the honor you pay me; but —"

"But what? Are you already engaged?"

"No; but —"

"But my family isn't good enough for you, perhaps," snapped Mrs. Cobb, in sudden anger, "though I can assure you that I was a McNabb of Missouri, and that Mr. Cobb's grandfather —"

"Please don't be offended!" I cried anxiously; for, although I did not want to accept her offer immediately, still I was filled with terror at the idea of its being withdrawn. "Don't you see, so important an affair as this, I can't decide all at once — or all by myself. There's my family — my aunt —"

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Mrs. Cobb was mollified. "Your aunt, of course," she said. "We'll have to have the Duchess's consent, of course. And, my dear, you see I am frank with you. That is my motto, always frankness, frankness! But do you think your aunt would be inclined to — to notice her niece upon her marriage?"

Ah, now I understood! Mrs. Cobb's motives, which I had taken to be simply those of a mother wishing to manage a rather wild and difficult son, now stared at me straight and plain. The proposed marriage was to benefit not only dear Victor, but also his dear mamma; and the Duchess of Porthaven was to swing her niece's mother-in-law full into the enchanted circle of the society that she craved.

Oh, dear! there's no use, I found that out long ago, in being an idealist like dear papa, and expecting everybody to be high-minded angels. A philosopher takes people as he finds them, and when he sees that they are selfish and sharp, he just does his best to be selfish and sharp back again. And, after all, wasn't it a comfort to consider that I had so capital a card to play against the Cobb millions as the social influence of Aunt Elizabeth?



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I put on, therefore, a more reserved and distant manner, something in the style of the Duchess's own, while Mrs. Cobb explained her idea : —

“ We'll just stay in New York City long enough to get a few more clothes, then go directly to the cottage at Bar Harbor, — a sweet little place, my dear, so exclusive, you'll feel yourself at home right at once. Victor will join us there. Dear boy, he's so upset by this recent affair, I'm afraid we shan't see him on the pier to meet us. However, a bit later — Well, as I was saying, we'll announce the engagement at once. Then in August, just in the crush of the season, we'll have the wedding !”

“ Oh !” I cried, startled at this suddenness.

“ Yes, my dear, in August. Then the honeymoon on our yacht, the *Brunhilda*. Then — let me see, what would be the most stylish thing ? — Scotland, probably, for a couple of months. I'll take a shooting box in the Highlands, and you shall ask your uncle and aunt and their friends to join us.”

“ Ah !” I cried again. But, after all, why not ? It was only as a poor relation and matrimonial rival of her girls that Aunt Elizabeth disliked me,

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and as for Uncle Porthaven, he would go anywhere for the sake of killing things with a gun. "Yes," I said, "they probably would come."

Mrs. Cobb's eyes glistened as she went on weaving her plans. "Then your aunt, at New Year's, will send in your name for next year's Drawing-room? Surely, your aunt will present you at Court on your marriage? Yes? How splendid it will look! 'Mrs. Ethelbert Victor Cobb, Jr., of New York, presented by her aunt the Duchess of Porthaven,' and then 'Mrs. Cobb of New York, presented by her daughter-in-law.' Ah!" and she closed her eyes with that kind of voluptuous expression that the dogs at Brent took on when you tickled their stomachs, or Aunt Elizabeth when she spoke of "money — much money!" Yes, how nicely they ought to get on together, Mrs. Cobb and Aunt Elizabeth!

"Then Paris and your stylish relations there," went on my would-be mother-in-law, weaving her plans with the swiftness of lightning, "then back to London for the season, then another summer at Bar Harbor, then finally, year after next, open the house on Fifth Avenue for our grand campaign!"

How long she must have been laying her plans,



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to have everything so complete and so thoroughly thought out ! I felt like a little hare, hemmed in by beaters and guns, in the woods at Brent. The offer was a splendid one, no matter what Victor should turn out to be. I could see Aunt Elizabeth and the girls bowing down to Lili, lately so snubbed and despised. I could imagine the scene of the flower show at Brent, with its little taste of admiration and the great world, repeated in some chic London salon ; and I saw Lili in a spangled frock with diamonds in her hair, distributing smiles and frowns to a ring of admirers like the famous American beauty at that same famous flower show. As for Lili's husband, he was somewhere in the background, covered up in flowers like the chains that hold a triumphant float in a procession in the Fête des Loges. But ah ! he was there !

It was strange, considering the perfectly simple and reasonable proposition that was being made to me, that I should have felt so invincible a shrinking from saying yes. But I hesitated. I trembled. With an involuntary movement I carried my hand to my bosom, where I always wore beneath my blouse the locket that was my talisman. Ah, Harriet, that my papa loved, aid me now !

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“ Well !” Mrs. Cobb’s voice prodded me as the goad of a Pyrenees peasant prods his ox. “ Well, dear, and your answer ?”

“ I must have a little time,” I answered confusedly. “ I must ask permission. I must ask advice. I must see the lady that I’m to visit —”

“ Ah ! the lady of East Tenth Street !” Words cannot properly reflect the scorn of Mrs. Cobb’s voice. In spite of my loyalty to the lady of my dreams, I blushed for Harriet.

“ Is it such a very bad street ?” I asked. “ But perhaps, after all, she doesn’t live there any more.”

“ Any more ! Then how old is it, this address ?”

I hung my head. “ Several years, Madame.”

She regarded me with pity. “ Several years ! Is the child mad ? She thinks that a house in New York is like a home in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, where the families move out only when there’s a revolution. But perhaps we can find her in the directory. What is her name ?”

There was a knock at the door. A garçon entered the cabin, very bustling and important. “ All first-class passengers are requested to go to the dining saloon to make their report to the customhouse officers !”

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"What's that?" I cried in a panic, as he slapped some printed forms of papers down on the table and dashed out again.

"It's your first step toward entering the U. S., my dear," replied Mrs. Cobb, grimly; "but, once you are in, doubtless your friend will take good care of you — better care than I could, I'm sure — if we can only find her! Her name, my dear?"

There was no interruption, this time, to save me from the humiliating truth, and no inspiration came to help me. "I only know her maiden name," I faltered, feeling myself ridiculous enough; "her married name — I never heard it."

"Ah! and when was she married?"

I hung my head like a fool. How wild and intangible they seemed now, the visions that in the solitude of Brent, above the old letters had reared themselves on so solid a foundation! "She was married before I was born," I answered in a whisper.

From outside the door came the scream of whistling tugs, the grinding of cranes, the shouts of stevedores, — all the blind, crushing confusion

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of this unknown new world in which I found myself. And it was here, here! that I had thought to find Harriet like a little lost, lonely star in the great white river of the Milky Way. I who had prided myself on my intelligence, I who had called myself a philosopher, and patronized Aunt Elizabeth and my Vauquières relatives at Paris, — this was where all my science and my cleverness had landed me! The night that I left Fontainebleau I thought I knew what loneliness was. But now at this moment it seemed to me that for the first time I knew what it was to be alone.

When Mrs. Cobb spoke next, it was in a tone of kindness almost motherly. “And how much money have you in your purse, my poor child?”

“Nearly five hundred francs,” I answered in a whisper.

“And you have your maid with you, dependent upon you?”

“Yes — poor old Gèneviève.”

“Then, if you do not find this lady at the address you have for her, you will abandon all idea of staying in America? You and your Gèneviève will use the passages that the Duchess

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has taken for you, and go back to England by the next boat?"

To England! I felt a qualm in my stomach, like that first day when the deck began to rise and fall under my feet. If it were to my dear France that I was to return — but in France no home waited for me any more.

"No," I murmured, "I don't want to go back — I can't go back!"

"Then, it is only the idea that you may perhaps find this lady that holds you back from accepting my offer?"

"Yes, Madame. You see, it is not that I am ungrateful. I am very grateful, indeed I am! But if I should find her —"

Mrs. Cobb leaned toward me. Her jaw and shoulders were set like a personified will, pushing and crushing mine even more powerfully than circumstance itself.

"Then, dear Mademoiselle, it is agreed that if we don't find the lady you seek, you come with me?"

I drew in my breath. I could not go back to England, I could not starve in New York. "Yes," I answered steadily; and I felt the word close round my soul like a manacle.

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“You go with me — on the conditions that we have discussed? It is a promise?”

“It is a promise, Madame!”

She regarded me doubtfully. “Yes, you promise me, dear Mademoiselle; but young girls are capricious — and though Victor is the most perfectly stunning and corking fellow in his whole set, and such a winner with the girls as never was seen — still, who can tell but when I’ve taken all possible pains and presented you and announced the engagement and all, that perhaps at the last minute you’ll find some one you think you like better and go back on me, and there will be Victor and I looking as foolish as two cats on a fence!”

To this flood of eloquence I made no reply. I walked to the window of the cabin and looked out at the city which now appeared near enough for me to touch it with my hand, — the city, the iron city where, beside the shadow of a memory older than myself, there waited for me not one single friend — unless, like Faust in the opera, I pledged myself body and soul to such friendship as was now offered me. After all, why should I hesitate to give it, the pledge she asked? In



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the position where I had put myself, what choice was left to me?

“Madame,” I said, “in nearly a thousand years, for so long as we possess any records of my family, not one of my race has broken his word. Do you know the motto on our arms? *Vauquières tient parole!* Where I give my word, Madame, I keep it, if I have to go to the guillotine like my great-grandfather!”

This was awkward. Mrs. Cobb became immediately quite offended at hearing her darling boy compared to the Widow Guillotine. So I had to apologize, and she forgave me, and then we cried a little, and shook hands on our bargain, and finally actually kissed each other like Aunt Elizabeth and one of her darling girls when there’s an eligible young man in the vicinity.

The rest of the day was a whirl of reporters, of customhouse inspectors, of shrill-voiced and very chic ladies who welcomed Mrs. Cobb at the dock. (Victor was not there — something to be thankful for, I told myself.) Then the whirl across a dingy, clanging city to the dingiest — ah, *Mon Dieu!* — the saddest and shabbiest little den of a house that was ever seen outside of



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the Latin Quarter. There were names in shabby gilt signs — strange names like German Jews — all up and down the front of the house, with advertisements of Cheap Stylish Tailoring for Ladies and Furs Made Over. Then beside the front door was a row of tarnished bell-pulls, and a dirty child with a tin pail in his hand trying to reach up to pull one of them. A frowzy woman, all red like a fishwoman at the Halles, stared down from an upper window as the limousine halted and the man held the door open for me to descend.

“What! Then we’re at home!” I cried with a sinking heart.

“My home! No, dear child. This is the address of your friend that you are going to visit. Tell Ludovic the name, and he will make inquiries.”

In five minutes, however, the scornful Ludovic returned with the news that the house contained not a soul that had lived there more than eight months — and all Russian Jews at that!

Ah, Harriet! I had come too late. Over that dingy, desecrated threshold had passed for the last time the feet that my papa loved, and which to the last had wandered through his

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dreams. Who could tell where they walked now, whether on earth or only in my dreams, those beloved feet? I think I cried a little as I leaned back in my corner of the limousine and thought of all I had hoped to hear from Harriet about papa and what he was like when he was young.

Mrs. Cobb, I must confess, was extremely decent. Neither in word nor in glance did she tell me what an imbecile I was. From her eyes, however, shone her triumph. And at the telegraph office, on the way up to the avenue, the limousine stopped to send the following message:

“Duchess of Porthaven, Brent Castle, Devonshire, England.

“Will you consent my marriage New York millionaire Victor Cobb? Will you and Uncle come to wedding Bar Harbor, August; girls bridesmaids? Wire response. Mrs. Cobb books your passages steamer.

“LILL.

“— Fifth Avenue, New York.”

Within twelve hours I had the following answer:

“Yes. Blessings.

“PORTHAVEN.”

## CHAPTER VI

*C*RAC! Here is Lili, no longer a poor relation but a personage!

After the humble pie that I have swallowed in this last half year, I find that one eats well here on Fifth Avenue. It is very agreeable to be consulted about everything, and to be fitted to ten dresses a day, and have nothing to do but drive about in the limousine to choose summer hats and ropes of pearls at a big shop they call Tiffany's. My pearl rope goes about my neck twice and falls nearly to my knees. It makes my skin look rather brown; so it's settled that I am to wear it only with afternoon and theater frocks (my new ones — loves!). For the evening I am to have a diamond collar with a ruby pendant and stomacher — and a few other little things. But all that we buy now, Mrs. Cobb says, is only preliminary: the real shopping is the things we order now, to be delivered in Bar Harbor in time for the wedding. Such gorgeousness, such dresses, such jewels, such hats! What Aunt

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Elizabeth and the girls will say when they see again their little black mouse of a Lili, I really can't think.—At any rate, it won't be "Come here, Lili!"

It really looks, in fact, as if I should have no further need of the philosophy I have cultivated so carefully. Unless, indeed—

Yes, there is one little point on which I feel now and then a small flash of uncertainty,—my husband!

To be sure, I'm not an unpractical goose like Portia and the girls, looking for somebody who will be madly in love with me and give me thrills when he kisses me. But he will have to kiss me, I suppose, this Victor, when he is my husband. Well, there is nothing like philosophy. I will just think of Brent and those hours of French conversation, then of the way New York looked when I thought I'd have to enter it alone—and I'll try to be brave as my ancestor was at the guillotine. Though, to be sure, after all, Victor may not be so bad as that. And since for the present he quite refuses to see me, it is perhaps superfluous that I disquiet myself about his future attentions.

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Yes, my fiancé, it appears, is nursing the broken heart that holds the image of the show girl. Poor thing! I'm sure I don't mean to laugh at him. It must be quite horrid, when you are obliged to marry one person, to know you are quite in love with another. I haven't that trial, at any rate, and I feel quite sorry for poor Victor. When we are married, I'm sure I shan't object if he wants to go back every now and then and flirt with his Fay (Fay it appears is her name, and she is said to have the most beautiful figure on Broadway — according to Mrs. Cobb). At any rate, whether I object or not, it appears from what I used to hear at Brent, that that is the way all husbands do. And the wives, if they are discreet, can have *their* freedom, too. Would I, I wonder? Somehow, I don't think that is what papa would have advised, or Harriet, either. Oh, well! we'll see. The first step evidently is to see my fiancé.

But he, unhappily (or happily?), refuses to see me. He has given his consent, signed and sealed, to this marriage that his mother's ambition has arranged for him. But when he came up from Atlantic City to go to a place called

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White Mountains, he didn't even pass through New York, though it would have been much more convenient for him. No, he had his automobile put on a scow in a way his mother explained to me, and ferried from Jersey City up to the Harlem River (I am becoming quite a New Yorker already — their names come so easy to me now). So you passed near enough for me to touch you, my husband, and I never even saw the back of your head! That pleasure is shortly to be mine, however. It is arranged that Victor and his broken heart are to take themselves on to Bar Harbor and be ready to receive us there in another fortnight. Ah! the idea is not gay. But, then, life is not gay, and one can't expect to have all that I have now, without paying for it.

The wedding is fixed for the tenth of August. The sixth of August the Cobb yacht, the *Brunhilda*, a great steamer that looks almost as big as the *Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse*, is to be sent to New York to meet my august relatives on their arrival in America. Uncle and Aunt Porthaven, with three of the girls, have already signified by cable their acceptance of this offered attention, together with their cabins *de luxe* on the steamer



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and Mrs. Cobb's Bar Harbor hospitality for a month. My Uncle Phillippe and Aunt Félicité at Paris (not the Marquis, the head of the family, but his younger brother, Comte de Vauquières de Clugny, of the Île of Puteaux fame) have also promised to join the party. Oh, la-la ! it will be a merry party, all at Mrs. Cobb's expense, and she the merriest of all at being permitted to entertain such flowers of aristocracy.

Already, though the wedding is, of course, not yet announced, the American journals are beginning to heave and rumble with the news of Mrs. Cobb's approaching apotheosis. All day long the side door of the Fifth Avenue house (the front doors and windows are boarded up. It appears that every chic New Yorker keeps his town house boarded up at least eleven months of the year) — all day long the doorbell keeps tinkling, and reporters — gentlemen reporters and lady ones, too — come marching in with their notebooks, hungry for news. Then — oh, every morning the bundles come in from the clipping bureaus, and Mrs. Cobb and I go through them with pencil and shears ! It appears that I am already known from the Atlantic to the Pacific, through



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all this new world, as La Belle Parisienne, the beautiful little aristocrat that Mrs. Ethelbert V. Cobb, widow of the oil king, has captured and annexed. My personal charms, my huge black eyes and vivid gypsy fascinations (!) are all catalogued and described, till one would think I was a new opera singer, or else royalty. My august relatives on both sides, be sure, come in for a full share of publicity, also the fact that Mrs. Cobb's cottage is this summer to harbor such noble guests. She sniffs and pshaws and pretends (even to the reporters!) to be very much put out at all this advertising. But ah! I have seen her lay down a letter from Victor half read, and turn to the packet of newspaper clippings when they arrived in the morning!

And I, the vortex of this whirlpool, the central point of all this straining, and luxury, and ambition — am I happy? If a month ago, before buying my passage for America, I could have seen where my voyage would land me, would I have sailed away just the same?

Mystery! In any case, it is too late to put this question to myself or to the unseen, because now Lili's word is given and her fate is fixed.

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Before the end of two months I shall be carrying a new gold cardcase monogrammed E. C. and filled with cards engraved in this fashion:—

MRS. ETHELBERT VICTOR COBB JR.

—*Fifth Avenue*

I shall have new rings on my fingers, new recollections in my head, and — oh, new kisses on my lips! What will it be like, oh! oh! when Victor kisses me for the first time? Afterwards I suppose I shall get used to it; but at first it must be terrible.

Well, it's no more than every woman has to go through that wants to have "Madame" before her name. And most of them don't get pearl ropes and a steam yacht in exchange.

So be it. In any case it appears, from a letter received from Aunt Elizabeth this morning, that I have done extremely well for myself, and am

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a child for my family to be proud of. She even offers, without so much as waiting to be asked, to present me at next year's Drawing-room — so my mamma-in-law's pet project is already assured. As for Victor — who knows? Perhaps when I see him I shall fall at once desperately in love, like one of Marcel Prevost's heroines (hush !). And perhaps, an even more likely chance, as he is marrying me only to get the twenty-five millions of his inheritance, and is always in love with Mademoiselle Fay, perhaps he won't want to kiss Mrs. Ethelbert V. Cobb, Jr., at all !

Who knows? Courage, Lili !

## CHAPTER VII

*WHO* knows? *Courage, Lili!* It is only fifteen days since I wrote those words, but ah, now I know. Now you know,—and where is your courage, Lili?

But, after all, do I know? Is it not rather the fleeting influence of a moment that has touched me, the brief unclosing of a door through which I caught a glimpse of what life might be—while before me, around me, every day and all day long, I see what life must be.

But Lili, my poor little one, you rave! Come, collect your data, and arrange your narrative in the cool and dignified spirit worthy of one whose ambition is the philosophic calm!

First, our departure from New York. Immensely chic! In the lead Mrs. Cobb and I, in new motor coats and wonderful white veils, rattling around like two dried beans in a plate of soup, inside of the immense new limousine that was brought over on the *Kaiser Wilhelm* with us.

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Behind us went another machine, filled with Mrs. Cobb's *personnel*. Not the ordinary servants, because she keeps a special staff in each of her houses; but important people like her secretary, the new footman she brought from Paris, her masseuse, and that sort of thing. On the two little seats in the limousine were perched Mrs. Cobb's maid and poor old G nevi ve, clutching my new jewelry box on her lap and looking about her with amazement, like a cow that regards a train that passes.

That night, as we had started late, we did not get very far. We slept at a town called Springfield — such a nice quiet little place after the roar and hurry of New York! In the little hotel it was funny to see the way people stared. They stood in two lines for us to pass between as we went in and out to our automobile, and fought for places next to our table in the dining room. Yes, it is amusing to travel like a queen, even with a Victor in the background!

The next day, up early and off — a beautiful June day. The roads were the bumpiest, dustiest affairs I ever saw; but the country was sweet. It reminded me of Normandy, — all the apple

## HER WORD OF HONOR

trees and the little churches. But the churches, and the houses, too, are built of wood — imagine that! How rich every one must be, to use wood like that! The houses are painted white, with green blinds and little pointed roofs, the quaintest thing that ever was seen; and such lots of little flower gardens and such lots of hens running about, I never did see.

But the peasants themselves, I regret to say, are not so agreeable as in France. They are very long and lean and stylish (there's no costume of the country here, it appears: the women all wear pink blouses and chic hats, and the men —); but they sometimes have not very nice manners, I own. They scowl in such an independent way when Auguste, the chauffeur, calls out to know the way; the little boys sometimes throw stones; and then there's one kind of peasant who sticks right in the middle of the road with his cart and won't let the automobile pass, whether to one side or the other. But, then, the air is so fresh and clear, and the pretty little girls throw flowers, and I love so the things we get to eat at the funny little hotels! Mrs. Cobb scolds, and says the food is atrocious; because we get nothing



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but beans cooked with molasses and pork (so droll!) and — oh, so many different kinds of pastry! They call it pie; but I love it and eat them all. Oh, I like America!

As the afternoon of the second day wore on, the air grew fresher; every now and then we caught glimpses of the sea.

“We’re nearly there!” said Mrs. Cobb. A red spot burned on each cheek, and I could see she was thinking of her darling boy. But the same reason that urged her on held me behind. The blood was in my cheeks, too; I could feel it burning. But — ah, not with delight! What was I going to see, now at last that the moment had come for beholding my husband?

So it can be imagined that a little while after six o’clock, when the limousine blew out its carburetor, or its magnometer, or something like that, I was not so heartbroken as the rest! In fact, I was delighted. Another hour of freedom, — another hour before my fate should close on me and grip me, never to let go again!

“Now what are we going to do?” cried Mrs. Cobb, almost in tears.

It transpired, you see, that Auguste would have

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to go to the town himself to get the part that was needed, because, as it was an imported car, no one else could understand; and Ludovic, the electrician, had to go with him because no one else could speak French and English too, and so interpret for him. Oh, it was a mixed up and confused affair! Then, of course, Mrs. Cobb couldn't stay, because her darling boy was waiting for her, only an hour or so ahead. During all these consultations, the touring car with the servants was drawn up alongside; and finally it was decided that Mrs. Cobb and the two Frenchmen should get into the touring car, where there were already several places to spare.

"And you, dear child?" asked Mrs. Cobb, hopping out of the limousine and into the other car with a lightness that surprised me.

"I will do precisely as you wish, dear Madame," I answered meekly, as I knew better than to let her see that I wanted to stay. "It seems to me that in these first sacred moments of encounter between mother and son a stranger could be only superfluous —"

Mrs. Cobb looked relieved. As a matter of fact, I could see that she anticipated some rather

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strong discussions in her first sacred moments with her darling boy. Just as well, perhaps, that the subject of these discussions should delay her arrival for such time as was possible! So she looked delighted and relieved, and accepted with joy my proposition that I should wait in the disabled limousine till Auguste came back and fetched us.

“You can keep your *Géneviève*, dear,” she said fondly, “and, let me see — the cook must come on — but I can spare my *masseuse*; she’s very strong in case anything happened, dear child.”

“There are Indians about?” I asked with just a little bit of doubt. Mrs. Cobb assured me that the dangerous ones were all dead, and that I was near home, anyway.

“You are already on Mt. Desert Island,” she said. “That was the bridge we passed five minutes ago. You are no more than a half-hour from Bar Harbor. In an hour and a half at the most, therefore, you may expect Auguste back again. Or — why not? Yes, dear child, if Victor is there, and if I can talk him into good humor, I will send him back himself to fetch you!”

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Here was an agreeable prospect! A tête-à-tête drive, on my first encounter with my new fiancé! What should we talk about — and would he try to kiss me? I felt cold and hairy all over at the thought. However, it was too late to draw out! ]

“Ta-ta, sweet child!” cried Mrs. Cobb, as she waved her hand from the other automobile. There was a puff, a toot, and they were off. I sat there alone between poor old G  nevi  ve, who clasped the jewel box and sniffed, and the massage woman, who rubbed her long hands together and growled at the whole business.

As for me, however, I liked it. To be sure, it was a bleak, savage sort of scene, not a bit like France; but it pleased me just the same. It seemed to me I had been set down in the midst of mountains, — bleak, windy-looking mountains whose slopes ran down to the cold gray line of the sea. In spite of the little houses scattered here and there along the shore, and in spite of the automobiles that occasionally passed, it seemed to me I had never before been in so sad and solitary a place. Though it was June, we seemed to have left summer behind us in New York. As we sat

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and waited, a cold, fluttering wind began to blow up out of the sea, with a wet smell like rain. Yet it wasn't rain, after all; but white ribbons and streamers like mist; then suddenly a mass of fog, like a great, white sea monster, that swooped down on us and swallowed us up. So there we were, the three of us, cut off in a little, narrow, salt-smelling world of our own. Somewhere in the distance a foghorn began to roar, just like the steamer. G  nevi  ve crossed herself with a shivering hand, and began to pray.

"Oh, why did we ever leave our dear France, to come to this country of savages?" she said.

"Hark!" I cried.

It was only another automobile passing; but it tore up very close to us, giving a moment's glimpse of a low, gray racing machine, with a pair of eager eyes that stared through the mist above the driving wheel. Touf-touf-touf! then it disappeared into the fog, touf-toufed again; then — I heard its puffs coming back. A moment later the fog opened and the gray machine drew up beside the limousine, like a tugboat beside the *Kaiser Wilhelm*. A young man was in the driver's seat. He took off his glasses, and I saw

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his blue eyes as he examined the name plate of the limousine.

"It's a Fiat machine, all right," he said to the mechanic seated beside him. Then, taking off his cap, he sprang to the ground and bowed to me.

I will not deny my heart gave a jump that nearly suffocated me. At last, the moment had come!

"I think," he said, smiling, as he held out his hand, "that my mother has sent me to look for you."

Ah, Victor! After all the telegraphing, and the scheming, and the arguing, here we are together at last! I did not say this aloud, however. I merely leaned down from the limousine window and gave him my hand. "How do you do, Monsieur Victor?" I began to say, but, if you will believe me, my voice died away like Portia's when she makes the responses in church. I don't know why it was, but those blue eyes seemed to run through me and leave me no hiding place even in the inside of my soul. How different they were from the miniature, those eyes, — unlike and like at the same time! Their



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color and shape, so much the artist had caught; but in the foolish little miniature, what a simper, like a smirking *boulevardier* — and in the living eyes, what fire, what force, what kindness!

This impression, however, was all in the flash of a moment. Naturally, I could not remain staring like an imbecile; so I inquired as politely as I could:—

“So your mother arrived home safely?”

“Yes, and sent me off at once to look for you. Heavens! It was a shameful trick, leaving you alone like this. What will you think of our Bar Harbor hospitality?”

He seemed quite outraged at the way I had been treated. It was delicious to see any one so big and strong angry like this for my sake. It made me feel taken care of and protected, somehow, as I had not since my dear papa died. Oh, decidedly he was what papa would have called a “chic type,” this Victor!

However, I laughed and said: “It was my fault; for I offered to wait. And you see there’s no harm done; you found me, after all.”

“Yes,” he answered; “though it seemed a rather desperate task,—in a real Bar Harbor

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fog, to be sent searching for a young lady I had never seen. But, you see, my mother described you to me."

I could not help laughing. "And she described *you to me!*"

"I knew that you had black eyes!" he cried.

"And I knew," cried I, "that your eyes were blue!"

Then, as I met the glance of those bright blue eyes, I realized how strange, how bold, a thing I had said. What would he think of me? Even to a fiancé, one does not say such things at a first interview. I felt myself blushing, — blushing red, blushing crimson, blushing fire! But how kind he was, Victor, and what a man of the world! Instead of laughing at me, or paying me silly compliments as the young men did on the boat, he merely opened the limousine door.

"And now," he said, "I am going to take you home. I will leave my man here to take charge of the limousine until the mechanic comes back. As for the maids, they can wait with him. Will you come?"

I hesitated. The gray racing machine looked so rakish and dangerous, somehow, with its long,

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low lines and its places for just two! To go off this way, alone with a young man in the fog and gathering night — what would my Aunt Elizabeth, what would my Aunt Félicité, say to that?

“Come, please! Surely you don’t want to stay here, to starve and catch cold in the fog?”

His voice, though so gentle, had a commanding note in it that made me feel like a child. How old was he? A little older, perhaps, than I had thought from his picture. It was his new mustache, perhaps, that added a year or two. Still, thirty was the utmost age that could be given him, — so much younger, after all, than Aunt Elizabeth, who always stirred me up to a wicked sort of rebellion when she gave me her commands. But when Victor said “Come!” it seemed like papa saying it, and I went.

He helped me into the rakish, low seat of the racing car, and tucked the robe about my feet. The wind had loosened my hair, so that it blew in little wet curls about my face — so untidy! I put up my hand to push it back under my veil; but Victor looked up sharply at me. “No!” he said. “Let it stay like that!” Really, it was ridiculous, the way, when he said a thing, it

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didn't seem possible to do anything else! The thought ran through my mind: very convenient, too, in a husband!

After arranging me all comfortable in my seat, Victor turned back to give a few last directions to his chauffeur, and reassure poor old sniffing G  n  vi  ve and the growling massage woman. He spoke French so nicely, after all the fearful gibberish one hears in America, it was quite a delight to hear him. Then, as he stood a moment more by the limousine, talking with his man, I just dared to lift my eyes and look at his back for an instant; and I thought of the joke Uncle Porthaven used to make about tombstones, that sometimes they spoke the truth!

And in that minute, as my eyes rested on that tall, alert back and the tanned line of neck showing between the close-cropped blonde hair and the collar of the English motor coat, — in that moment I realized for the first time, not in a vague distant vision, but as a real, living fact, that I was to be married in six weeks and this man was to be my husband. But here was the strange thing, — this thought, which until now had chilled me like the idea of a grim duty, now

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seemed to me the most natural, pleasant thing in the world. And it dawned on me that if I could have picked from the whole world of men for my husband, this man whom Fate had already selected for me was the one that I would have chosen.

So he jumped into the car beside me, threw the lever, and we were off. The fog closed around us. I had a strange, wild sensation, like dropping through air on a falling star. "If getting married is going to be like this," I thought to myself in a confused sort of way, "then I'm sure I needn't have been so afraid of it, after all!" Then the thought came to me that this was what I had been coaxed to do, bribed to do, in fact paid to do, — to sit beside Victor always, and share his life for the rest of my life! Ah, what a farce! Paid to do the thing that pleased me more than anything else I had ever done in all my life! It seemed so ridiculous that I laughed out loud.

Victor turned as quick as a dash. "Why do you laugh?" he said, and his eyes shone into mine.

I could not very well tell the truth — now, could I? So I invented an answer. "I laugh,"

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I said, "because the fog makes tears on my lashes. See! So, if I did not laugh, perhaps you would think I was weeping!"

"Please do!" he begged.

"What?" I cried. "You would be glad, then, if these were real tears?"

"Perhaps," he answered, and his eyes twinkled with a kind of gay mockery that hinted, somehow, at depths more serious than the tears he jested about. "Yes, who knows? If I thought that perhaps I might have the privilege of drying them —"

"Now," I said to myself, "now he's going to say something!"

But he didn't. He only went back to his wheel again, quite grave and businesslike. Then he turned with a laugh.

"I've a confession to make," he said. "I'm driving her in half speed. Somehow — I can't explain it; but it's a fact — somehow, I'm in no hurry to get home. Are you?"

"Your mother will be waiting," I said, shaking my finger at him the way Ermentrude used to do at the curate.

Victor, however, seemed more impressionable than the curate. He stared at me in such a strange



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way, and then a curious thing happened. The red crept up under his tanned skin — up, up to his forehead. And suddenly the veins on his temple, which I had not even seen before, started out like cords.

“Now he’s going to say something !” I said to myself again. “Now the moment has come that I’ve been so afraid of ! Now — now, perhaps, he’s going to kiss me !”

But he didn’t. He turned back to his wheel, as before. And for the second time in my life it seemed to me that I had a queer sidelong glance into that living mystery that half the world carry with them, which is known as a woman’s heart. My first glance had been in the cabin of the *Kaiser Wilhelm*, when Mrs. Cobb, speaking to me of the son I now saw before me, had revealed the longing and the disappointment that tore at each other in her heart. And now I — I, myself, what did I feel ? I had looked forward with dismay, with horror even, to the time when my future husband should claim his right to kiss me. But now — be honest, Lili ! — when the moment had come that I thought he was going to, and then he didn’t, a sudden strange pain shot through my

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heart. What did it mean ? Where was the transformation, and what the miracle ?

Suddenly he leaned toward me. "Your veil is coming undone," he said. "May I tie it for you?"

"But the car?" I whispered. Provoking! my voice had failed me in the stupidest way, and I could only whisper. However, he did not seem to notice.

"I can drive with one hand," he said, smiling, "and tie the veil with the other. I am a sailor, you see, and the first examination we pass is in tying knots with one hand."

The veil, heavy with mist, whipped my face with cold streamers. But Victor's hand, bare and wet, touched my face with a strange kind of warmth. What was it, the strange, sudden warmth that he carried with him ? Was it that made him different from any other human being I had ever known — even my dear papa whom I loved so ? But this — a joy so new and so acute as to be almost pain ! Every moment more, every moment more, I seemed to be caught away in something blind and golden, that filled my soul as the sea fog filled my eyes.

The wet streamers of chiffon licked my face and wrapped themselves around Victor's hand as

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he tried to bring them into order. The strange thing was that, though I had never felt anything of the kind before, nor even heard any one talk that had had such an experience, yet it seemed to me quite plain, from the expression of Victor's eyes, that he was feeling just the same as I. Suddenly I remembered Uncle Porthaven's library and the books I had read there; and, according to the habit that I have tried to make in life, I forced myself to look for the scientific truth. "This is love!" I said to myself. "This is not magic, but the simplest thing in the world. We are falling in love!"

Victor's hand, wet with the fog, touched my wet cheek; and it seemed to me that some one was stroking me all over with folds of warm velvet. A little curl blew out in a foolish way and caught about his finger. And — oh, it seemed to me that a summer wind was blowing among the roots of my hair — a warm, garden wind, scented with flowers. Oh, strange, strange moment! Oh, sweet and wicked moment when it seemed to me one instant that the breath I drew was that of a queen and the next instant that of a slave!

I laughed.

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"Why do you laugh?" asked Victor.

"Nothing," answered I. That was a fib; for I couldn't tell him — could I, now? — that I had just remembered all my qualms and terrors at the idea of the moment when I should have to let him kiss me. But the notion wasn't so terrible, after all. No, no, quite the contrary; and somehow at the thought little thrills seemed to run down my arms and out at my finger tips, like electricity, and I felt all warm and trembly and almost wild, as I met Victor's eyes. How did I know it? I don't know; but I did know that the same thought was in his head that was in mine. His blue eyes went from my eyes to my lips, then back to my eyes again. Oh, how lovely life was in that moment! Oh, dear and lovely life!

But the moment ended, like all beautiful things. The automobile, turning in at a wide, stone gate, flew up a long driveway between rows of tall, dripping trees. The house was long, low, and covered with vines like an English parsonage — so pretty! The next moment the door opened and an elderly butler came down the wide steps to meet us. He bowed low to me; then addressed Victor in a discreetly, inaudible voice.

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“No!” cried Victor. “Jove, now! That’s a rotten shame — I beg your pardon!” He turned to me. “What do you think? My poor mother just had a wire from Baltimore, from her brother who’s very ill there — apoplexy, poor old boy! He’s very low, not expected to last more than a day or two. Poor old boy — I’m sorry, I’m sorry! So mother left at once, by the six o’clock train. Jove! not very polite to you; but you understand, don’t you?”

He appeared so anxious that I should understand! But, to tell the truth, though I was sorry for the poor gentleman that was dying, I wasn’t so sorry — not heartbroken, that is — to think of the days before me free, quite free, from my future mother-in-law’s company and conversation. But Victor kept on explaining and apologizing. We drifted into the entrance hall, — a huge place like the baronial court at Porthaven, all skins and stagheads, with a fire at one end where they seemed to be burning a whole tree at once. A smart maid hovered near.

Victor, as though in sudden relief, drew a long breath. “But my aunt’s here, of course. She’ll receive you and chaperon you, all right.” He

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turned to the maid, who addressed him anxiously in French : —

“ Oh, Monsieur, have you heard the news ? Madame received a telegram and left at once — at once ! She left all her apologies and a thousand affectionate things for Mademoiselle. She will write to-night on the train — ”

“ Yes, I know,” Victor interrupted this torrent of eloquence. “ Go and ask Madame Vanhuysen if she will be so good as to come downstairs.”

“ Yes, Monsieur.” The maid vanished.

Then, as the butler appeared with tea, Victor and I sat down in front of the great blazing fire to drink it. How beautifully he poured it out ; how skillfully he arranged the footstools so that my feet were just on the edge of the fender, though as a matter of fact, my shoes weren't wet a bit. But it was so pleasant to let Victor take care of me ! So we drank our tea together while he made plans for the summer, — wonderful plans, all automobiles and aëroplanes and balls and races ; everything, in fact, but the great plan of all which he never mentioned. That was nice of him ; for, somehow, to have spoken of it now would have spoiled everything.



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Suddenly there was a brisk step behind me and the whisper of trailing satin. I turned to face a thin little lady, very erect and dignified, not at all like Mrs. Cobb. I sprang to my feet.

"You know the news already, my dear Henry," she said. "Your mother was so sorry, so very sorry, to leave us as she did! But her poor brother!" She sighed. "And so this is the young lady," she said, turning to me with a pale smile. "Welcome to Stornaway, my dear child!"

Henry! Why did she call Victor, Henry? My head swam. And the next minute I heard the little lady's voice saying:—

"But there's some mistake! My dear Henry, I thought we were expecting Fanny Carroll!"

"Miss Carroll, certainly, Aunt Mary!"

Was it all a dream? Were my ears wrong, or had the whole world slipped awry? "Miss Carroll?" I gasped. "But I'm Lili de Vauquières!"

"What?" My new friend looked at me, and I looked at him. His eyes were quite changed and pierced through me. Did he in that moment feel what I felt? Ah! the beautiful visions that had floated half seen between us,—where were they now, since Victor was not Victor, after all?

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“ And Fanny, meanwhile, where is she ? And this young lady’s friends, what are their feelings ? I think, Henry, that you will owe apologies all around ! ”

Henry turned to me. His eyes were tragic. “ How can I explain ? ” he said humbly. “ But you see I only arrived home at lunch time, and Miss Carroll had already gone off on a day’s excursion. I’d never met her, you know, — she spends all her time in London, and I am nailed to my office in New York. So, when word came by telephone that the car had blown off a cylinder head out there by the bridge, I was a bit doubtful about going alone to find her. However, mother gave me the description — Carmen, she said, set right down here in this island of Mount Desert ! By Jove ! ” he made a gesture of desperation. “ How was it possible to mistake ? For, if you’ll excuse me, Miss — er — ” he hesitated on the name, “ if you’ll excuse me, famous beauties aren’t so very common, especially those of the Spanish type, that a man might expect to find more than one waiting to be rescued in this northern fog ! ”

He smiled at me, and I smiled miserably back.

“ Yes, that will do for your explanation, ” came

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the brisk voice of Mrs. Vanhuysen; "but meanwhile there's poor Fanny still waiting in the fog, and this young lady's friends waiting for her!" She turned to me suddenly with keen eyes of inquiry that convicted me suddenly of guilt.

"Please excuse me," I faltered. "I'm visiting Mrs. Cobb — Mrs. Ethelbert V. Cobb. You see, I'm a stranger; so when she had left me alone in the auto, and promised to send back her son, I naturally thought —"

"Yes, a very natural mistake all around, and a very odd coincidence into the bargain. So you took me for Mrs. Ethelbert V. Cobb and my nephew here for her son?" Though her politeness was perfect, yet in her manner of pronouncing Mrs. Cobb's name I could see that this lady represented Society — the Society toward which my future mother-in-law yearned, which had not yet admitted her right to exist. And I, Lili, was to be the opening wedge. How miserable — how miserable life was, after all! So I stood there like an idiot, while the sharp little lady directed her nephew to telephone to Mrs. Cobb's house that I was there, and at the same time to order the auto to take me home and to search

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for the other Carmen young lady lost in the fog.

Suddenly there was the horn of an automobile outside; then a ring at the door, with voices and laughter. A moment later, with a great flurry of veils and silk mantle, a girl dashed in at the door and up the long hall to Mrs. Vanhuysen.

"Oh," she cried, "I'm late! Isn't it ridiculous! You see, the car broke down over there by Sorrento, and —"

"Yes, you telephoned," returned the rigid little American lady, "and we immediately sent for you; but my nephew made a little mistake, Will you allow me to present him? Miss Carroll, my nephew, Henry Stuart. And Miss Carroll, Miss —" She turned to me with her little cool air that, with perfect politeness, put me in my place as Mrs. Cobb's friend. I held up my head.

"Mademoiselle de Vauquières de Clugny," I said quite distinctly.

Miss Carroll, still tugging at her veil, held out her hand with a cordiality that touched me almost to tears. "We've all heard of you: you're famous already," she cried. "You're in America

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visiting Mrs. Cobb, and you're going to marry her son on the tenth of August!"

There was an instant's silence. My new friend's eyes touched me — touched me like fire. I couldn't speak. But he spoke.

"You're the fiancée of Victor Cobb?" he said. "Allow me to congratulate you, Mademoiselle!"

I couldn't speak, I couldn't even feel. But I heard Mrs. Vanhuysen's tight little voice saying:—

"So, when you took my nephew for Mr. Victor Cobb, it was even more interesting than we thought —"

"Ah," cried Miss Carroll, "I've not only read about you, Mademoiselle, but I've seen you before!"

With a final gesture she threw off her little automobile bonnet with its enveloping veil, and stood flushed and sparkling in the firelight. In a flash I recognized her — yes, the American beauty of the flower show at Brent, the other Carmen whom even Aunt Elizabeth had said that I resembled, and who had first opened my eyes to possibilities that I had not dreamed.

"At Brent, don't you remember? The flower

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show. You were pointed out to me. You were with your aunt, the Duchess of Porthaven —”

“What!” said Mrs. Vanhuysen. “This young lady is the niece of the Duchess of Porthaven?”

Oh, magic name of Aunt Elizabeth! In an instant the intruder, the little unknown friend of the upstart Mrs. Cobb, had become the honored guest. To the niece of the most famous woman in England (next to her Majesty) this dry little American woman, my unwilling hostess, became supple and clinging like an old glove. Ah! beyond a doubt I realized in that moment the good bargain that Mrs. Cobb had made; also I recognized how inexorably I was held by it, and at what price.

Henry drove me home. We didn’t talk very much; but as we passed under a huge, castellated gate, and wound up a long driveway, all new and raw and yellow in the fog, he leaned toward me.

“So, Mademoiselle, you are going to marry Victor Cobb?”

“Yes,” I answered under my breath.

“And yet, Mademoiselle — excuse me; but this is what has been puzzling me — you took me for him! For him, your fiancé!”



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“I’ve never seen him!” I answered faintly. I was ashamed. What would he think of me, this stranger who was already more to me than any friend?

“Well, I’ll be damned! Excuse me — but how —”

“It was Mrs. Cobb arranged the marriage. And my aunt consented, and so — so what could I do?”

Before a huge mound of building, dwindling off in the mist with Norman turrets and Moorish domes and who knows what else besides the car came to a stop. My new friend jumped to the ground and held out his hand to me. As I descended with his aid he bent suddenly toward me.

“Tell me, Mademoiselle — you took me for your new fiancé. Suppose — suppose you had been right, after all, would you have been very much displeased?”

His blue eyes laughed at me, but with something behind them that was not laughter at all. And all at once into my own eyes came something that blinded and stung. Henry’s image blurred and swam before me; but I heard his voice saying, quick and breathless: —

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“What? What?”

The chauffeur had disappeared on the other side of the car. The house was a grim blank in the fog. And suddenly as Henry stooped toward me I had the impression that he was going to kiss me. Just for a minute — the sweetest, most terrible instant of my life — the impression touched me; only the impression, however, and nothing more. For the next instant the great door swung open in a blaze of light, and a footman began a leisurely march down the steps. And the next minute, in a flurry of mantle and veil that she had not even removed, Mrs. Cobb came tearing after him.

“Is it her? Is it you, Lili?”

Yes, I was touched — in spite of everything I was touched by her affection as she seized me and kissed me and exclaimed over me. “What a scare you have given us! Oh, it’s been perfectly terrible! They found the car with nothing but the servants in it and you kidnaped by a perfect stranger! We’ve been telephoning all over the island —”

Henry stepped forward with explanations and apologies. Henry! what right had I to call him

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Henry, even in my thoughts? As I saw him standing there beside Mrs. Cobb, I realized how far I had let myself wander in the land of dreams. The gentleman that I saw before me was a stranger, a courteous stranger — and behind that door waited my husband — *my husband!*

Mr. Stuart touched my hand, said a few polite words. The next moment the fog had swallowed him up. Mrs. Cobb, heavy and puffing in her haste, dragged me up the steps.

“Come, my dear, he’s here! Come! Come!”

We entered the hall, — a blaze of electric light, of gilding, and of many colored marbles. My eyes, dazzled by the brilliance, were aware only of a tall figure that advanced to meet us.

“Darling boy, come! This is Elise! And Lili, this is Victor!”

## CHAPTER VIII

THAT evening, at the beginning of the splendid dinner served on gold plate and handed by gold-embroidered waiters, I ate a new shellfish. It was both salt and bitter, Mrs. Cobb said like the sea; but it seemed to me that it tasted of tears.

“What delicious clams, Victor! After all, there’s nothing like American food. Lili, you must do honor to your new home, and eat all its specialties. Parker, clams to Mademoiselle!”

That was the hardest part of it, to have to eat; to have to smile, to be gay — with Victor, the real Victor, sitting there opposite me, clinking clamshells and scowling into his plate.

“Big baby! Isn’t he cute when he sulks!” cried his mamma, fondly.

Whether he looked *gentil* or not was a matter of taste; but that he looked like a baby, and a sulky baby at that, was perfectly plain. How could I ever have taken the other one for him, — for this fat, clumsy type of a peasant, dressed in

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a knitted blouse of white wool, with uncut yellow hair that certainly had been combed by no hand but the winds. His hand, lying on the tablecloth, was thick and fat and freckled, with bristling pads of hair between the knuckles. — Henry's hands, like his feet and ears, were beautifully finished, with that unmistakable look of race. And his carriage, how erect and easy, his glance how alert !

Certainly, and to my sorrow, there was scant resemblance between the two young men. Yet it could not be denied there was in both a kind of resemblance to the miniature, — as though the painter, wishing to earn his money, had copied rather an ideal face that existed in his own mind than the living model before him. And this ideal type, as might easily happen, was Henry Stuart.

So much for the resemblance. But — oh, the difference — the difference ! And those abominable clams that I was forced to choke down, with their salt wash like tears ! To this day I cannot eat them, even disguised in cocktails, without tasting again the bitterness of that moment, and my first vision of what my new life in America was to be.

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"Vicky, bad boy! What do you mean by coming to the table in a sweater? And why don't you have your hair cut?"

"We're in the country," growled Victor, helping himself to more clams, — gormandizer! How many he ate! "As for my hair, I'm going to let it grow until I can bite it."

"Then bite off a lock for me, darling boy, and one for Lili!"

A lock of hair for me, indeed! No, that wasn't in the bargain. I would marry Victor and be faithful to him, since that is the habit of our race; but what image I carried in my heart — and what hair in my locket — that was my business! And I remembered the head that had so lately bent toward mine with the hair — oh, so neatly cut and brushed, and the little line that showed so blue-white against the tan of the neck! But it was all a delusion, that ride through the fog, wild and happy like falling through space on a star. And here before me, stuffing clams, was the reality.

As a protest against the marriage that was being forced upon him (so his mother had hurriedly explained to me before dinner), Victor had



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announced his intention of appearing like a barbarian before his new fiancée and before the stylish world here at Bar Harbor. Accordingly, he came to the table in the same funny fisherman costume that he had worn sailing in the morning, and sat there in a white, woolly heap, like a great polar bear, while the elegant embroidered footmen served him silently.

So the clams were taken away and soup was served. "Now is the moment, Lili," said I to myself, "if you claim to be a philosopher, to vindicate your right to the name!" The sweet moments of the afternoon, the dear and tender dream—I would lock it down in the depths of my heart as papa had done with his dream so long ago. After all, if Victor disgusted me, was that not what everybody (except little white geese like Portia and Ermentrude) expected in a husband?

But, to tell the truth, Victor was not really disgusting. No, in those dismal days at Brent, when I prayed to my husband to come and rescue me, I am sure he would not have disgusted me at all; and even a few hours earlier, before I had learned to compare him with *the other*, I probably could have accepted him with all the phi-

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losophy that I aspired to. But now — ah, Saint Elizabeth, my sacred patron, be with me and give me strength for the day when my husband shall kiss me for the first time ! Afterwards, perhaps, I shall grow used to it ; but the first time —

Mrs. Cobb, who had been gazing at her son with eyes that shone as I had seen them shine when she spoke of him on the steamer, broke out in sudden expression of her enthusiasm. “ Oh, Victor,” she cried, “ what a boy you are ! I like your kind, Victor, — I wish there were more like you ! ” Then, turning to me, “ Well, Lili,” she said, “ you haven’t told me what you think of my bo-oy.”

With a jerk I pulled back my whirling thoughts to the reality across the table, fat and puffy in his sweater, with his pink and white complexion and his lusterless blue eyes. But for a moment, as Victor’s eyes met mine, they lit with the beam of a sudden expression, — arrogance, resentment, admiration, call it what you will. And in that fleeting instant it seemed to me that a soul stood revealed to me, — a soul that never in its life had been thwarted in a caprice, nor had taken into consideration the wishes of another person ;

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but which now, balked in its supreme desire, and seeing in me the instrument of its disappointment, was resolved to make me pay that grievance to the utmost. — And, somehow, finding the idea of my payment not so repulsive, after all; for those heavy eyes said they did not find me ugly. No, I cannot tell what that glance said! But it opened to me a new vista of the things that lie below the surface of life, the things that the married ladies whisper about when they send us young girls out of the room. And my skin crawled as I looked at Victor's hands, red and hairy against the white lace tablecloth, and his blue eyes that examined me up and down with the arrogant curiosity of one who has paid down the price and holds the right. Ah, my husband! That word means more than I thought, after all. Even if I had not met *the other* this afternoon, that glance of my new owner would have turned me cold.

But all this was the impression of a fleeting instant, and Mrs. Cobb's question waited. But nothing better came to my lips, with a little hysterical laugh, than papa's old phrase. "A chic type!" I cried, stupidly enough.

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Victor laughed, and again his eyes ran over me. As for his mother, she was ravished. "Oh, Lili," she said, "you're right! Wait till you know him better, and you'll find him all you hope, and mo-ah!"

After dinner, so far were these optimistic words justified that Victor became quite agreeable. His mother having expressed a wish to hear his voice after so many months' abstinence, an old German lady (Victor's governess of former days, retained as a kind of housekeeper) was summoned from upstairs and sat down before the immense concert grand piano. So she crashed out Wagner-like chords against which the Garde Republicaine could not have made itself heard — far less Victor, whose voice was very husky and little, proceeding with a very strange effect from his large, wide-open mouth. However, that didn't matter, as his mother, with her eyes rolled to the ceiling, heard him with an ecstasy that would have distinguished her boy's voice above the fog whistle of the steamer; and as for me — I knew the songs already by heart. The curate used to sing them interminably after dinner, at Brent.

"Oh, Lizer! dear Lizer!"

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And so on. They never stop, those songs. But after an hour or two Victor did, to relate a long story of how once in a game of football he had nearly killed another chap. That is, he had aimed a slug at him which, if it had hit the other chap, would have killed him; but the other chap dodged. During the recital of this tale his mamma's sparkling eyes said to me, "Isn't he a wonder!" And when it was done, she proposed that we should go in a body to the new picture gallery to see the famous portrait of her darling boy by Chartran.

"No!" shouted the darling boy (he always speaks in a kind of roar like the captain calling to a sailor on the ship). "The portrait can go burn! I'm going to the stable to see my new bull pups. Didn't you know Folly has had a litter?"

"But, my dear, Lili doesn't care for pups. And you can't expect a young lady to go out in all this fog—"

His glance replied, "If Lili doesn't care for the pups, she can go burn!"

But I hastened to restore peace by professing a fanatical taste for pups. So out we went,



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through the cold, wet dark, to look at a heap of little, blind, squirming things. Victor put one on my bare neck, and roared when I screamed. Ah! his hand on my neck! Yes, there is no doubt about it, he is my master and he intends to make me pay.

On the way back to the house Mrs. Cobb squeezed my arm enthusiastically. "You've made such a hit to-night, dear, — at least I'm sure, from the dear boy's tremendous spirits, that he's delighted with his little fiancée. Cheer up, little one: between us we'll make him forget that horrid showgirl — you'll see!"

Forget his showgirl — ah, that was what I was afraid of! I wanted to laugh out loud — yet I could not; for in her voice was that throb of real yearning which in our first conversations had compelled my sympathy, and somehow made me feel I was a woman, too. That the object of her worship was prosaic, even grotesque, made no difference. After all, was her feeling more irrational than the one that, perhaps, had come into my own heart that very same day? And then, always with the same note of passion in her voice, she went on to pierce the very center of my



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dreams — which, as it happened, lay in the region of her dreams as well.

“So it was Henry Stuart that brought you home? And you met Mrs. Vanhuysen? I suppose you know who she is — but no, of course, you don’t know anything yet. But I can assure you the name of Vanhuysen —” she stopped to take a long breath; then, recovering herself, “What was she like, dear?”

“She was very polite. She said she knew my Aunt Elizabeth.”

“So you brought in the Duchess? That was very tactful of you, dear — gratifying, most gratifying. And Mrs. Stuart, was she there? Mrs. Mecklenburgh Stuart, my dear?” She smacked her lips religiously over the syllables, like Uncle Porthaven sampling his hundred-year-old claret. “Don’t tell me, Lili, that you don’t know that name!”

“Mrs. Stuart wasn’t there. She had just been called away by a message to her brother in Baltimore, who is dying. I thought all the time, you know, that it was you.”

“Her brother, the Bishop! Ah! if it were my brother, my dear!” Her eyes, gluttonous of so

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much grandeur, dedicated her brother seven times to the tomb, if so high a title might be cut upon his marble. She drew a long breath. "So they're coming to see you, my dear?"

"They said so. That is, Miss Carroll asked if she might come, and Mrs. Vanhuysen said she hoped they might see me there."

"Ah! and of course the invitation includes your chaperon. Though I won't go, the first time. No, I'll wait. But Miss Carroll — Fanny Carroll, that made such a hit in London this year?"

"Yes. I saw her at Brent, when I was there with my aunt."

"So she saw you with the Duchess? Oh! it's really turning out quite too splendidly! And Henry Stuart, too! So you took him for Victor?"

"Yes — you see, he took me for Miss Carroll."

"Very romantic, — a very charming little adventure that has landed you immediately among the very people I want you to know. Henry Stuart! He's been making himself quite famous lately with his aëroplane. They say that the other day he beat the Limited from Boston to New York. We'll see him later, in the aviation meet

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here. And besides that, among the young lawyers they say he's quite the cleverest in New York. Yes, altogether quite the first catch in our set — after my Victor. Yes, there is a resemblance!" And her eyes went to her darling boy, who sat with his rubber-soled shoes on an embroidered satin cushion, smoking a little shiny pipe that smelled most horribly.

"Victor, love, you know Henry Stuart, don't you?"

"He was first marshal, my freshman year. All the fellows were crazy about him. I couldn't see why. Rotten snob, is what I call him!"

"Yes, dear boy, you never were appreciated at your full value at Harvard. I'm sure it wasn't my fault, Lili; for I gave the dear boy fifty thousand dollars a year just for spending money — and as for him himself, you see what he is! Well — now, thank Heaven, things are beginning to go splendidly, and soon we shall all be launched in the world where we belong!"

## CHAPTER IX

YES, it seemed that she spoke the truth. Thanks to her eager scheming, thanks also to the chance that had aided her, it seemed that Mrs. Ethelbert V. Cobb was at last managing to squirm into the magic circle of Society. Among the people that called on us in the succeeding weeks, and the invitations that poured in upon us, I could not of course tell the spurious from the pure gold; but it appeared that the Faubourg Saint-Germain of Bar Harbor, of America itself, was at last opening its doors to Mrs. Cobb.

“It’s the Duchess that has done it!” she cried to me one day; “that is, the Duchess and your pretty looks. Do you know what they call you, my dear? ‘La Belle Scheherazade’ — that was what Colonel Appleby called you the other night. He said it was all over town.” She looked me up and down, just as she had that day on the steamer when I came into her cabin in my peignoir. “And, to be sure, it’s not a bad name,

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to hit off your strange, Oriental style, — that Damascus rose, floating-down-the-Ganges kind of look you have, along with the true Parisian chic. Those eyes of yours — the depth of them, and the way they're cut back almost to your ears — they're positively devilish, you know! I suppose you know there's not a thing in trousers on this island that's not positively lashed to your chariot wheels; in short, head over heels in love with you, — old and young, from the President of the Polo Club to the last lobsterman! And yet your manners are so perfect, you conquer the women, too — or the men drag them along, I don't know which. Do you suppose for a minute that Mrs. Vanhuysen, for instance, would be so nice to us if her nephew weren't smitten, just desperately smitten, with you? By the way, it was he you took for Victor, that first night of your arrival, wasn't it? A fortunate chance, since it got you at once in with Miss Carroll and Mrs. Vanhuysen — though how you could mistake anybody in the world, even Mr. Stuart, for my beautiful bo-oy —"

Yes, I have seen Mr. Stuart again — in fact, every day! The morning after our adventure

## HER WORD OF HONOR

he called to leave his card for Mrs. Cobb and inquire whether I had taken any cold. The next day he came in the afternoon with Miss Carroll, and with Mrs. Vanhuysen's cards of invitation to tea the next day. The day after that, he arranged with Mrs. Cobb to find us on the tribune at the polo meet; that evening at a dance for which Mrs. Vanhuysen procured us cards.

It was strange, between these appointed meetings, what a furious hurry I was always in! I ran upstairs and down. I scolded poor old G  n  vi  ve because she lagged in brushing my hair or lacing my corset. At table I ate as little as possible, and swallowed it very quickly — and on the road when Victor took the wheel from the chauffeur, I flattered him with a guile that I did not know myself to possess; I told him that he drove better than any mechanician, and begged him to go faster! faster! faster! till Mrs. Cobb screamed and the peasants shouted oaths at us from each side of the road.

Why was it, this wild thirst for speed? It seemed to me that something was burning up my blood, and that I must go very quickly in order to cool it — or that something was always



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behind me, urging me on with whips. And always, always one image in my eyes, one thought in my brain. And — be honest, Lili! — the moment Mr. Stuart had said good-by, I began planning and scheming and straining ahead toward the moment I might see him again. And it seemed to me that by hurrying very quickly I should arrive more swiftly at that desired point of time. What it meant, this ceaseless, irrational rush always toward the same thing, I did not even stop to think. And when the moment finally arrived, I forgot everything. Oh, the joy of those moments when I felt myself live! Oh, dear and violent and beautiful life!

It was at the aëroplane meet, two weeks after our arrival, that I first began to think.

Bar Harbor, like every other place in the world, has gone wild over aëroplanes. As we have here too many mountains and too much sea, with all the winds that blow, they have made the aërodome twenty miles inland, a half hour's motoring. Victor, though he has his machine like the other young men, does not fly as yet. His mother screams at the notion, and I can see that he is very glad to shelter himself behind her fears, using the

## HER WORD OF HONOR

delay of his teacher in arriving from Paris as his excuse. Henry Stuart flies, however; and only last month I hear he won a cup for a flight from New York to Philadelphia.

At the meet, as Mrs. Cobb and I descended from our automobile with Victor (very chic to-day, nicely shaven and in a beautiful new pale gray suit) behind us, Henry came immediately to meet us. We were a little late, and the monoplanes were buzzing over our heads. But Henry's turn had not come yet. How handsome, how alert he looked in his buttoned-up scarlet suit, and with his leather helmet swinging from his hand!

"Give me your good wishes, Mademoiselle," he said, "to carry into the air with me!"

I hate *aéroplanes*, — treacherous, fragile things to carry a precious life up into that hollow gulf of air! "Take my good wishes, all the good wishes of my heart, up into the sky with you. They have little weight indeed to impede your flight!"

In spite of my joy at seeing him I could not keep the sadness from my voice. And to my surprise he also became suddenly serious. "You think your wishes have little weight — you think so, Mademoiselle?"

## HER WORD OF HONOR

“Who knows?” I answered.

“Try,” he said.

In spite of the swarms about us, of Victor at my elbow, of even the air crowded above our heads, it seemed to me that we were alone among the stars as his eyes met mine. And his voice, with its one little word, went echoing, echoing in my ears.

“But if you think your wishes are not enough, Mademoiselle, if you’d like to give me something more material for a mascot —”

“Take my roses!” I cried.

“Thank you,” he answered, with a smile, “and, like the fellow in the romance, I’ll carry them higher than ever roses were carried before!”

“Ah!” said a voice behind me, — a quiet foreboding sort of sound that was taken up by other voices and went murmuring away over the field. I looked up. A Blériot, only a short distance from us, was oscillating strangely in the air.

“That’s Martin. Yesterday he almost missed his volplané!” said Henry, excitedly. And in that moment the monoplane turned completely over and came crashing to the ground. It was a horrid, sickening sight. I covered my eyes with

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my hand. In the midst of the roar that went up from the crowd, Henry dashed away.

"Pooh! a little tumble!" said Victor, vauntingly; but I noticed that his pink face had gone quite pale against his gray coat, and his hands shook. "Fifteen feet, no more! What's fifteen feet? And they're making a fuss over the chump as though he'd fallen fifteen miles!"

"Oh, my darling boy! You'll never go up in one of those horrid machines, I can tell you that!" cried Mrs. Cobb, in a faint voice.

Victor's relief was evident, but he continued to bluster. "Wait till Wettman arrives from Paris and gives me a few lessons, I'll show them a trick or two!"

"There's Henry's machine!" said Mrs. Vanhuysen's dry little voice at my elbow.

"Poor Mrs. Stuart!" cried Miss Carroll. "It's lucky she isn't here to-day."

"It's a nervous business," replied Mrs. Vanhuysen, uneasily.

At that instant the crowd below the tribune was cleft, and we saw the fallen aviator being carried off the field — quite white, with a cloth tied around his forehead.

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“But it’s nothing!” cried a young man, who had come to join our party. “A few bruises; nothing more.”

That was all very well; but the impression stayed. And in spite of the crowd that came as usual to surround Miss Carroll and me, I sat silent with my eyes fixed on the sky. Above us swooped the dragonfly wings of Henry’s monoplane, and I saw my pink roses fastened to his cap. The rattle of the motor was loud and dry; but only for an instant, fading off into silence as the machine climbed up into the sky.

“I say, what a corking flight!” “Ah, he knows his business, that chap!” Around me the voices swelled in enthusiasm. But I couldn’t bear to look any more; for fear of seeing that aëroplane turn turtle as the other one had done, and come crashing down to the earth.

It did not, however. Henry made a magnificent flight — a record flight, for altitude. And all the time my heart hammered against my ribs, as though it would beat my very body open. Ah! until that moment I had not known how dear he was to me — how bitterly, how unspeakably, dear!

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Of course it was none of my business, — I was a stranger to Henry Stuart; the promised wife, moreover, of another man, — but when he finally came back, pale, red-eyed, and smiling, to restore my roses to me, I could not thank him: I had something else to say.

“Monsieur, you said a little while ago that my wishes had weight with you?”

“Yes,” he answered.

“And you told me to try?”

“I did.”

“Then, Monsieur, don’t fly again. Promise me you’ll never fly again!”

The crowd, acclaiming the popular aviator’s success, surged around us. Every instant, Henry’s notice was claimed. Then, smiling, he turned back to me: —

“Mademoiselle, your roses! They will tell you how sweet it is, that upper air!”

“Yes; but they are dead, the petals are shriveled and curled. No, it’s a sin, we were never meant to go so high! Promise me, promise me!”

“But why?”

“Because I don’t want you to — because I can’t bear it! That’s why! Promise me!”



## HER WORD OF HONOR

Never in my whole life did I feel such excitement, such concentration of my whole will power on a single vital point. My eyes looked into Henry's. What he read there I do not know. But he smiled with a strange expression, so much the reflection of what I felt that I seemed to be looking into a mirror.

"Since you ask it, I promise," he said. "Never again!"

The next moment his friends had carried him off, and Mrs. Cobb was claiming my attention to tell me that Victor, poor boy, was feeling neglected. Ah, Victor! That was what I had forgotten. All the life seemed to die down out of me, and the blood stopped pulsing in my head. After all, what had I been thinking about? Why had I asked such a favor, the renunciation of his dearest ambition, of this American whom I hardly knew; and why had he granted it to me?

"My dear Lili," said Mrs. Cobb that evening, while her keen eyes ran through and through me, "though nothing could be more flattering, to me as well as to you, than the immense hit you're making here, and in the very first set, too, still,

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I must ask you, when we're all out together, to take a little more notice of my darling boy. Mr. Stuart, now — of course it's evident he's wildly in love with you, like every other man on this island — you naughty little fascinating Carmen, you! But — well, don't forget the tenth of August. A word to the wise — mum! The wedding invitations have arrived from New York, dear. Would you like to see them?"

Of course, I had to say yes. So with heavy feet I followed her to the library where the white paper boxes were piled nearly to the ceiling. They were very prettily engraved, I thought. They were in Aunt Elizabeth's name for the church, in Mrs. Cobb's for the breakfast to follow. The next day the secretaries began the work of addressing them and writing in the names. When I feel my thoughts wandering too much, I can always come to this comfortable shaded room where the pens scratch, and the small boy with the little sponge wets the envelope and sticks them. It is a sight that convinces me.

"This," I said to myself, "is success!" Yes, I had attained success. What would have been

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my delight if two months ago at Brent or six weeks ago in the despairing days of my voyage, I had had a vision of this triumph, this security, this petted luxury, this swiftly attained goal of a millionaire husband? I had grasped my dreams and more. But — ah! why had Destiny, in this fulfilling of all my ancient prayers, given me the sudden glimpse of another felicity that left my success dead and bitter in my hands, like withered herbs?

I suppose because I had deserved nothing better. I realized it now, how wrongly I had done, how far I had fallen since the day when I knelt and prayed to papa's picture for help to find the lady he had loved. When I had been offered something more tangible, "money, much money," I had given up the search very easily. Yes, I must have done wrong, or I could not be in such perplexity, in such misery, as at this moment. And the worst of it is, whatever I do now, I feel that it is wrong.

Shall I turn to the right or to the left? Shall I do what I want to do or what I ought to do? But what ought I to do? Since Mrs. Cobb's warning words called me suddenly to myself, I

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have avoided Mr. Stuart. But his eyes — how grim and sad they are when they meet mine! And Miss Carroll, laughing, teases me for a “little French coquette!” Ah, that — never, never! But that is what I appear to him, and I can see that the idea makes him suffer. Poor, poor Henry! Does he feel perhaps half or a quarter as badly as I do myself? And the worst of it is, he has kept his word to me. And I, what have I given him in exchange?

It was a two days' wonder, Henry Stuart's desertion of aviation, just after he had won his great triumph. He refused to keep his other engagements: he had had enough, he said. The *aéroplane* the other day was brought here from the *aérodome* and stored in the garage above their cottage. Even if I didn't think he felt a little bit badly about me, I'd know how he feels about losing the sport that's the passion of his life. I have, in fact, robbed him of everything, even his good opinion of me.

But, as for myself, I am keeping my word, too. But I have always my two roses, withered too soon because they flew too high.

But — oh, Lili, have you done any better your-

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self, you who call yourself intelligent, and pique yourself on your reasonable manner of looking at life? Could any poor cabbage in the garden have bungled its affairs half so miserably as you?

## CHAPTER X

**B**UT, just the same, Henry broke his word to me. At least I think so — that is, if it's not all a dream, what happened to me to-day.

Ah, what a day !

The first marvel is evidently that there is any Lili here at all, to tell what happened or to bewail it. Bewail it, yes, for in spite of all the philosophy in the world, what is so cruel as to receive from Destiny all we have asked or dreamed — receive it, that is, at the instant when our hands are tied and we cannot accept it ?

But attention, my poor Lili ! Begin at the beginning.

At the beginning, evidently, it was all Victor's fault. He took me out sailing in his horrid little boat. And, as though that weren't enough for me who hate the sea and am always quite ill and miserable on the water, he had to go and tip the boat over — ugh ! — and fling me out into the water, just where it is deepest and roughest and most icy cold.



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So unnecessary, too, that was the most aggravating part of it, for the wind wasn't so very high, and Victor is a good sailor — or ought to be; for he is never out of his boat. But as we slipped by under the crag where Mrs. Vanhuysen's house is built, we saw Henry sitting there quite melancholy in front of the garage, and the wings of his useless Blèriot glistening in the sunlight through the open door. My heart gave a twist as though some one were pinching it. And I wondered if he had received his invitation for my marriage. They had been sent to the post-office, a whole automobile full, the night before. But just the same he was keeping his word to me!

"There's a chap that's good and stuck on himself," said my fiancé, suddenly. "Thinks he's the only man on the island that can stroke a crew or sail a boat. I'll show him there are others!" And from that moment Victor began to show off.

In any case, sailing is an amusement sufficiently annoying when the boat tips over and your stomach rises up and rubs against your throat. But when, instead of pushing the rudder over and yielding to the wind, the person who steers the boat wants to show how courageous he is,

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and holds his long stick quite immovable when the gusts come, and the boat tips over — and over — and over — till the water rises up in a foamy green streak over the lower rail and you have to clutch the upper rail like a fly, to keep from falling off —

“Oh, Victor!” I cried again and again. “Please be careful! Oh, please — please!”

But he sat quite immovable at the stern, with his horrid little pipe, that smells so unpleasantly, clutched between his teeth. All around us the harbor was quite empty, as every one had gone out to follow a yacht race. That was where we were going, too, if only we could get out of the harbor. But the wind seemed to be straight ahead, and we went back and forth, back and forth, in a helpless kind of way. And every now and then a gust of wind falling down out of the mountains seemed to hit us like a cannon ball.

“He’ll see, the snob!” said Victor, as the boat trembled and rolled her rail under water. “He’ll see!”

Yes; but what did he see? The boat, instead of coming back again, went on going over — over. The sail dragged in the water. And all I remem-

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ber the instant I seemed to be falling off a roof, was how ridiculous Victor's mouth looked, wide open to shout, and the little, black, shiny pipe falling out of it.

The salt water caught my throat and strangled me. It was cold — oh, cold like the inside of a vault! For the moment it seemed to me that I had ceased to exist. Down — down I went in the icy cold. Then my hand caught something. I can't swim, of course; but at least I can struggle and kick! The next moment my head came up out of water, and I found myself clinging to the edge of the boat, which lay heaving under the water, like the pictures of a whale in the geographies. On top rode Victor, with his wet, yellow hair plastered over his forehead and his mouth opened, shouting. So I caught my breath, gasping and choking in the salt water.

“Victor!” I cried. “Help! Help! Victor!”

Now came a bad moment in my life; for suddenly, as eyes and reason returned, I became aware of the fact that from this source no help was coming to me. Not that good will lacked, poor Victor! For two or three times he leaned down from his slippery perch and made ineffectual

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passes at me with his hand. But he was frightened — *Mon Dieu!* how frightened he was! And every time he leaned down toward me, with his eyes still fixed on the distant shore, somehow his grasp just missed me and he had to straighten up and clutch the bottom of the boat to keep from sliding off himself. However, he managed to pass me a loop of rope that came winding through the water from the sail, and with this and some words of encouragement he seemed to feel that his duty was done.

“Here, Lili, hold on tight to this rope. And don’t be scared. Above all, don’t be scared! I’ll save you, Lili! I’ll shout!”

So he continued to shout, with his mouth open like a cave, and his eyes fixed on the shore. As for me, I seized the horrid little tangle of rope and tried to climb up myself on the overturned hull where he rode secure; but it was too slippery. I had nothing to hold on by, so I fell back every time — and each time that the icy water rode above my head, I felt my strength go, and then go some more. At intervals, as my head rose above a wave, I caught sight of the shore, so far away, and the harbor, with all its masts and funnels;

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but never a pair of oars coming toward us. And, even if a boat should come to us now, I knew that it would be too late; for I felt myself very weak and very cold. If I could have thought of a prayer, I should have said it. I tried; but none came. And quite clearly above the waves I heard my own voice saying: "It is a pity, after all, that I left Brent."

And all the time Victor never stopped shouting. Though I don't want to say anything against anybody, least of all my fiancé, still, I really can't help feeling that he acted rather like a pig.

Suddenly, as we rose up floundering on the crest of a wave, and I just found strength enough to raise my eyes, I saw the flash of a pair of oars. But — ah, so far away! My hands were numb; never, never could I hold on till that boat came. Then, at the same instant, over the shore above the boat, I saw something shoot up into the sky.

Ah! in a warm shock that was like life itself, I realized what was happening. Henry was coming for me in his *aéroplane*!

I drew one long breath — I had barely time, as the great dragon fly came sweeping toward me on

## HER WORD OF HONOR

the wind. The next instant I saw Henry standing up on the little seat; and without any volplané or anything else, the machine turned turtle and dived down into the waves, only a little way from us.

How my fingers clutched it, the cold, slippery edge of the boat! Slowly I began to count. If before I had counted twenty Henry had not come up out of the sea, I resolved to let go and go down and join him. Until that moment I had not realized what it means when we say a person is more than life to us.

“Sixteen — seventeen —” After all, there was comfort in the thought that down in that clear green water I should be with him at last, with no Victor to bother me, or silly nonsense about Social Position and so on. Then, all of a sudden, not more than three or four meters away, I saw Henry swimming toward me. The next instant, just because they hadn’t the strength to hold on any more, my fingers doubled up and slipped away. Down I went; all around me it was green, and I said to myself: “What a pity! If I could only have held on an instant longer!” Then an arm came round me — I felt the air in





*"Above the noise of the water, I heard Henry's voice in my ear." Page 147.*



## HER WORD OF HONOR

my nostrils again. And, opening my eyes, I saw Henry's face close to mine.

Now see how strange they are, these Americans ! Here was a man who I knew loved me, and who had just risked his life to save mine. Yet he didn't weep, or kiss me, or cry out. No, he merely said, in the most collected way in the world :—

“ Buck up, darling ! There's a boat coming ! ” But I must own there was a little break in his voice as his eyes looked into mine and he added, “ Thank God ! ”

On the hull above us Victor went on shouting and gesticulating wildly to the approaching boat. He never seemed to notice the aëroplane or Henry's arrival any more than he had noticed me. He just kept on shouting, “ Help ! help ! ”

Above the noise of the water, I heard Henry's voice in my ear : “ I broke my word to you, darling. Do you forgive me ? ”

But I could only gasp : “ Your poor Blèriot ! Oh, what a pity ! Your poor Blèriot ! ” It was ridiculous ; the tears were pouring down my face, the salt water was splashing into my mouth. I found myself laughing and crying in the most

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absurd way. Then, through the coldness, the rocking, and the wet, hurrying blindness, all of a sudden something happened — something I have speculated about often enough. But oh, the reality, how different it was !

Henry kissed me ! His lips, through the icy wetness of the sea water, burned me like the touch of melted wax ; and the heat ran through me in the strangest way. I felt myself all warm and quivery, not cold any more. Oh, it was lovely, lovely, when Henry kissed me !

“ Precious,” he said, “ precious little child ! I love you — oh, how I love you ! ”

It was strange and sweet, too, to see him so excited. Yes, for this time at least, all his wonderful self-command was gone. He just repeated the same words over and over again, and the arm he held me with gripped me so tightly that I almost lost the little breath that the salt water had left me. But I didn't need to breathe, any more than I needed to think. My head began to whirl, I felt myself falling, falling through a delicious kind of paradise, with Victor and all the miserable bothers of life forgotten forever, and Henry's cheek warm and wet against mine.

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Then all of a sudden came a big wave that washed completely over the two of us, and I felt myself drowning. I clutched Henry with all my force — but my poor force, what was it, after all the icy water and all the terrors? I had not even the strength to say good-by. The next minute I was gone.

Where? Where was Lili in that interval, when the light went out and all was silent? If she ever knew, most certainly she had forgotten before she came back. And — oh, she came back unwillingly!

A knife through my lungs, a dreadful weight on my chest, hands that rubbed and rolled and teased me as though for pure spite: that was the first thing I knew. I tried to tell them to leave me alone; but my voice wouldn't come. After all, what was the use of resisting? So I just resigned myself, while the hands went on tormenting me — oh, for infinite hours, endlessly! Then gradually, uncertainly, I began to feel happy. The pains left me, my breath began to come so softly it was a pleasure to draw it. I tried to open my eyes; but the lids were very heavy, and it really didn't seem to be worth so much

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trouble. So I lay in a kind of torpor, just thinking how lovely and warm the blankets were. Then I heard voices, all blurred and distant. It didn't seem worth while taking the trouble to listen; but just the same it seemed quite natural to hear again the last voice I had heard before going away.

Henry was saying: "What did the doctor say?"

A lady's voice answered him — such a sweet voice, I wanted to open my eyes and look at her: "Quite out of danger. A little sleep is all that's needed. And Mr. Cobb —"

Henry's voice interrupted, so violent I was glad to keep my eyes shut. "Damn the brute! He's all right; don't think I was worrying about him!" Then his voice changed. He whispered so softly that I could barely hear him: "How soundly she sleeps! Look, mother, did you ever in your life see anything so perfectly beautiful?"

There was silence for a moment; then I heard the lady's voice, in the barest breath: "My poor boy!"



## CHAPTER XI

IT was some hours later, when I was sitting up in bed and drinking some nice hot chocolate, that I heard the lady's voice again. But this time I saw her, too, rather short and stout, but with a profile like a statue and the most beautifully undulated white hair. She spoke to me so kindly about the wild risk her son had taken and how terrified she had been; but said that now she was glad and proud of him, especially after she had seen me. Then she smiled at me, and suddenly under her calm grace of manner I noticed the ripple of concealed excitement.

"So it was not only a very charming young lady, but a very famous one, that my boy had the honor of rescuing," she said. "For the last month I believe the papers have talked of little else but *Mademoiselle de Vauquières de Clugny*."

She smiled again at me. And for the first time I realized that Mrs. Cobb's campaign of newspaper publicity, which seemed so vulgar and

## HER WORD OF HONOR

bizarre to my European ideas, might seem equally so to the other Americans — Americans, that is, like Mrs. Stuart. I felt myself turning crimson, but I could not deny my hostess and future mother-in-law by apologizing for her, so I remained silent.

“I have not the pleasure of knowing your aunt, the Duchess of Porthaven,” went on Mrs. Stuart. “It is, in fact, many years since I crossed the Atlantic. But on the French side of your family —”

She stretched out a plump white hand, and on the counterpane before me fell a little glittering heap. “When the maid undressed you, I took charge of your jewelry,” she said. “Look, my dear, is it all there?”

Sure enough, there were the pearl hoops, the ruby clusters that Mrs. Cobb had bestowed upon me, together with the great diamond solitaire, so enormous that I cannot wear a glove over it, that Victor last week had pushed upon my finger. Mechanically, with my eyes still on the wide-open blue ones before me, I began slipping on my rings again. But the rings — bah! what did they matter, beside the dear, old-fashioned

## HER WORD OF HONOR

locket of pale gold, with my miniature inside, that Mrs. Stuart laid down beside them?

"The miniatures are quite uninjured," she said. "You must excuse me for looking; but you see I was afraid that the water might have reached them, and perhaps they were requiring immediate attention in order to save them—" Then, with that note of excitement rising suddenly high:—

"You must excuse such a question, Mademoiselle," she said, "but will you tell me—where did you get that locket?"

I stared at her. But there was something in her face that made it impossible for me to answer anything but the truth. "I took it from my father's neck after he was dead," I said.

She carried her hand to her throat. "Ah!" she said. "Ah!" Then she added, as though with difficulty: "So your father was—in short, you're the daughter of Étienne de Vauquières?"

I nodded, half stupefied with the new idea that ran through my aching head. And suddenly the dignified lady before me slipped down on her knees beside my bed. Her face thus

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brought on a level with mine seemed a new one, lit like a lamp from within, young and wild and beautiful under its crown of white hair.

"Look at me!" she cried. "Have I changed so much?"

Oh! I knew her, I knew her then. I began to laugh and to cry all together. "Oh, *Mon Dieu!*" I gasped. "You're Harriet!"

Her face began to twitch; but she answered me quite collectedly. "Harriet Wilson — that was my name: Harriet Stuart now. And when I was a young girl I was engaged to your dear papa. Then came that dreadful war. We left France: my father objected to my marrying a Frenchman. We heard the report of his death. Oh, tell me!" she cried ardently. "Did he blame me very much, do you think that he ever, ever forgave me?"

"I'm sure he did," I answered; "for he saved all your letters — I have them here, every one, in my trunk! And your name was the last, the very last, that we heard him say just before he died."

The tears came up into her eyes. "And you're his daughter!" she said. "Ah! how strange

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life is ! A turn of the wheel, and I lose Étienne. Another turn of the wheel, and his daughter is brought here to my house, washed up out of the sea like a changeling. Étienne's daughter, after forty years. And you, no more than a child. Ah ! *he* waited ! Ah ! he didn't forget so easily as I !”

Her head went down on the bed, and she began to cry, — long, strangling sobs that shook the bed and hurt me where I was sore. But I didn't care.

Ah, poor Harriet ! How very, very much she must have loved papa — almost as much as I loved him — to remember him all these years, and weep for him now with this wild energy of grief as though she had lost him yesterday. But if she loved him so much, why did she marry Mr. Stuart ? Then I thought of Henry, and it seemed to me that I had a cramp in my heart. Need I wonder at anything, I, who am going to marry Victor Cobb ?

Henry's mother ! This was Henry's mother, and she was also Harriet that my papa loved. It would have been too delicate a coincidence to be believed in, too apt and charming to have happened out of a romance, would it not, if that

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had been all there was to it? But it was not all. Stupidly I gazed at the great white solitaire on my limp brown hand. Though my head was whirling, I realized what that meant. I am going to marry Victor Cobb!

But there was time to think about that later. Mrs. Stuart began to ask me about papa, and to talk of him — oh, how reverently, how tenderly! After all the abuse I had heard of my dear papa among my relatives at Brent and the complete silence of the strangers that I lived with now, it seemed almost like having him back again, to hear little anecdotes about his youth, and how important he was at the Court of Napoleon III, and a duel he once fought, and all the ladies that were in love with him. So in return I told her all about his last years, when I knew him; and all his losses and troubles and how bravely he bore them, and her letters that I had saved and brought with me — oh, everything! Everything, that is, except one thing that I could understand, being a woman, too. She never spoke of poor dear mamma, except to inquire whether I looked like her. “For you don’t look at all like your papa,” she said, and sighed.



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"No," I cried, "he was so handsome and distinguished, my dear papa. And I, as you see, Madame — 'black as a mole'!" Ah, that horrid little phrase, even now it hurt and stung!

But Mrs. Stuart shook her head with a smile. "All the better," she said: "blondes are too common. If you knew how tired one gets of being a blonde, even before one's hair turns white! But you, with that gorgeous Eastern coloring, and those eyes! But I could have wished, you see, that you had looked like your papa. It would — it would have brought my young days back to me." Suddenly she leaned over my bed, and that hot look of youth came up again into her skin and eyes. "I was cheated!" she whispered passionately. "You ought to have been my daughter!"

I did not mean to think of myself; but, just the same, came up in my mind a sudden thought that burned me like — like Henry's lips, so short a time ago. I felt the blood in my face, and I knew his mother's keen eyes had read my thought. The youthful fire died down out of her face, I could see that the thought of herself had given way to the thought of her son, and her eyes looked

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at me with a smiling kindness that was like a benediction.

“Who knows?” she said. “After all, there are more ways than one for you to be my daughter!”

I looked at her. The same words that Mrs. Cobb had said to me two months ago! Then I began to laugh. Since Destiny had taken it into her head to play me so exquisite a joke, might I not just as well be chic, and laugh back again?

“Didn’t you get Mrs. Cobb’s cards?” I asked, still laughing. “I know she sent them to you. I am to be married to her son Victor, two weeks from to-day.”

But it was no use—I began to cry. Then the doctor came in and scolded her—her, the magnificent Mrs. Stuart—for agitating his patient. So I was left alone, with poor old G  n  vi  ve, who had been hurriedly sent for, telling over her beads at the foot of my bed. As for me, I turned my solitaire round and round on my finger and watched the shadows on the ceiling till I fell asleep.

## CHAPTER XII

SINCE long ago, when papa was alive, these two days have been the happiest of my life.

The doctor (dear man!) declared that I must not be moved. So here I stay, content like a lost spirit who, falling through space, finds foothold for a couple of days on a star.

I love this house! There is no gilding, or velvet, or embroidered footmen; but all is so cool and light and flowery; the sea wind blowing through seems quite in place, and you feel that it's really summer. Then there is no fuss about calling, or reception days, or anybody's Social Position. Even Mrs. Vanhuysen, though she lacks the sweet grace of her sister-in-law, is quite simple in her manner. She comes into my room every day to make me a formal little call; and Miss Carroll, too, makes me frequent little visits, always with such a rattle of talk about the people at Brent, or Bar Harbor, or making funny little jokes about Mrs. Cobb — yet so perfectly well-

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bred and kind, that there's nothing to get angry at, either. Then she talks about Henry, and what a wonder he is, and what a clever lawyer, and what a famous aviator until for some unexplained reason he renounced the air completely.

"Perhaps you can tell us if it's in consequence of a vow, Mademoiselle, since he broke it only to rescue you?" In fact, I might think she was in love with him, only she looks him straight in the eyes and calls him Henry, just like a boy. And, besides, she's going to be married in the autumn to a young man whose picture she wears in a bracelet, who lives in Chicago.

But Henry — ah! he and I don't look each other straight in the eyes. But when he looks away, I look at him, at that clear, energetic profile and those quick hands. And when I look away, I can feel his eyes on me; and in their glance I can feel the same hurry — hurry — and the same yearning hunger that I myself have felt all these last miserable weeks. He is unhappy, oh! my dear Henry, who for me forswore his favorite amusement, who has saved my life. He is unhappy for me, and I am as helpless to heal his sorrow as a little lost dog that cries for his master!

## HER WORD OF HONOR

He doesn't talk very much; I do not see very much of him. And certainly he hasn't talked to me again as he talked in the water that day. How wicked I am, because I wish — I wish — And yet, I mustn't wish. There it is, you see.

In the meanwhile, at least, I live in the house with him and see him every day. And his mother, whose eyes are like his, how kind she is to me! She has little delicacies brought to me all day long. And she talks to me about her young days in Paris, and the Court of the Second Empire, and papa.

This, I say to myself, is what life might be if things weren't already arranged otherwise. No bluster and bragging, no straining and scheming: just to live so quietly with these two people whose heads are full of beautiful thoughts, and whose hearts are full of kindness for me. No, I can't — no, I can't go away and leave them, and go back to the Cobbs! I can't! But I must! There it is again, you see!

Mrs. Cobb has been to see me every day — overjoyed, you may be sure, to possess the Open Sesame that brings her through a door like this. Victor comes, too. He has one cheek badly

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swelled, the result of a toothache, the result of a cold, the result of his exposure in the icy water the other day. His mamma evidently does not begrudge a full account of the symptoms. But no! I must not laugh at her: she is so sincere, poor thing! And, after all, Victor is her own son, as Henry is Harriet's; so I mustn't wonder, I suppose, if she really thinks him a marvel of brains and of grace, and believes the long tales he has told her about his heroism the other day in saving my life. It is amusing to see Victor's arrogant head come down, and the frills of his lips quiver, and his eyes regard me sidewise and imploringly. He is so afraid, you see, that I will tell his mamma the real facts of his conduct on the overturned boat! As though I would do anything so ill-bred! But it is amusing to see him shake, just the same.

"And so Victor saved his little bride's life," says his fond mamma over and over again. "Ah! it makes me turn pale when I think of it. What heroism! What coolness! What romance! Ah! how proud I am of my darling bo-oy!"

And Nurse declares me to be a perfect type of a French marquise, which is the highest praise



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she can give. And as for Henry — “Ah, if it were this Monsieur here that was to be the husband of Mademoiselle, instead of that other !” she says, until it seems as though I should go wild.

For the moment, however, it was quite another idea that set her pirouetting around me with her ancient air of mystery.

“Well, G  nevi  ve, what is it ?”

“Mademoiselle, I wait till the automobile of Madame Stuart has surely left the gate ; for she told me to wait till Madame Stuart and Monsieur her son had surely gone out, before I announced her !”

“But who, G  nevi  ve ?”

“But the young person who desires to speak with Mademoiselle, to be sure !”

“There is a lady who desires to speak with me ? Then why didn’t you say so ?”

“A lady !” G  nevi  ve screwed up her face. “A lady, not quite — a lady of the half-world, perhaps. Well, a person that the footman of Madame wished to put to the door ; but she pleaded so earnestly to be allowed to see Mademoiselle —”

This was growing interesting ! Ladies I knew

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in plenty since my introduction at Bar Harbor; but half-ladies! Whether in America or in France, my acquaintance among these was limited, and I felt natural curiosity.

“But her name, *Géneviève* — did she give it?”

“Oh, I forgot! Here is her card.”

With a patronizing gesture *Géneviève* produced a large visiting card, violently perfumed and bearing these engraved characters: Miss Fay Martin, Sixth Avenue.

In a flash I understood. “Show her up immediately, *Géneviève*!”

“But if the ladies should come to your room, *Mademoiselle*?”

“But you said they have all gone out in the auto, and Mrs. Vanhuysen told me they would not be back till tea time. And, anyway, hasn’t Mrs. Stuart given me full liberty to feel myself at home? Show the lady upstairs, *Géneviève*!”

A moment later, a little person, elegantly dressed in white, and with meshes of red hair showing under her closely wrapped toque, was shown into the room. Though I am by no means in love, as you may fancy, with my future husband, still, I will own to a throb of curiosity as

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I surveyed her. What was the type of woman that could pierce that egotism, rouse that sluggish interest? My first impression was that of disappointment; for, in spite of her embroidered Empire frock and the long chain on her gold bag, Miss Fay was at first sight far from seductive in her appearance, — plain and pale, was what I said to myself. But her eyes, as they were lifted to me, gave me a new impression; these eyes she had were very large, odd, and attractive, with much-linked black lashes and beneath them the brilliant gleams of iris which one always associates with adventuresses. I drew a long breath. According to Mrs. Cobb, I now stood in the presence of an adventuress of the purest water. A new experience, a new sensation!

“Mademoiselle Vauquières de Clugny?” inquired the newcomer, in a languid drawl, but pronouncing my name in the strangest way and with a curious twang in her voice.

I nodded. “Be seated, Mademoiselle!”

She sat down, crossing her legs very high and showing the most beautiful white silk stockings.

“You must excuse my coming here this way,” she said, “but it’s impossible to get into the

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Cobbs' place. The old lady — I mean Mrs. Cobb; excuse me — keeps such a tight hold on her little boy that it's as much as one's life is worth to bow to the poor chap on the street. And as for getting into the house and seeing you, Mademoiselle — well, it was not for little Fay! So I just thought I'd profit by your being on neutral ground; that is, in the house of another lady. You will pardon me, won't you?"

Perhaps I was not so severe as I should have been to this intruder who spoke so freely of my future husband and his mother; but I merely answered with some coldness: "You wished to speak to me, Miss Martin?"

She appeared embarrassed; between her hands she twirled a lace handkerchief of doubtful freshness.

"You see — really, it's rather awkward. Now I'm here at last, I hardly know what to say. But, you see, until just recently I was engaged to Victor Cobb myself, and he was engaged to me. I'm a showgirl, you know. I'm in demand right along for high-class shows, and in 'The Dollar Princess' I had three lines to say. That's where I met Victor — Mr. Cobb. He proposed

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to me right away, and I accepted him. Then his mother butted in and talked of cutting Victor out of his father's will and all that if he married me. Victor wanted me to marry him secretly; but no, not for me! I love the poor boy too tenderly to be the means of impoverishing him." Her green eyes shot out a knowing beam, and in spite of myself my lips twitched in a smile. Suddenly she sprang to her feet, her hand on her heart and her head in the air.

"Mademoiselle," she cried dramatically, "imagine my feelings last month when I read in the papers that Victor's mother had returned from Europe and that he was to be married — married at once to the daughter of a Duke! I cried all night! Then came the terrible letter from Victor, talking about poison and revolvers — well, you know! So things have been going from bad to worse until finally I decided to come here and speak to you face to face, as one woman to another. What are you going to do about it?"

The question quite took my breath away. What was I going to do about it? I was tempted to answer her that I am by no means of a jealous

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disposition, and certainly, where poor Victor is concerned, it could only be a relief to me if my husband should have some — er — distractions elsewhere. But alas! I knew Mrs. Cobb well enough to realize that Miss Fay Martin's cause, as she presented it, was hopeless.

"Mademoiselle," I answered wearily, "what are you expecting me to do? Are you asking me to break my engagement? As you know, the cards are already issued for the marriage, twelve days from now. Next week my family arrive from England to be present at the ceremony. What are you suggesting that I should do about it?"

"I don't know," she answered sullenly; "but where's the use in being a swell if you can't do as you please? And to tell the truth, I thought perhaps you might feel different about marrying Victor when you hear he's in love with another girl—"

"Why," I cried, "what difference could that make?" Then I remembered Portia's and Ermentrude's ideas, that your husband must bring you a handsome fortune and a heart full of love. Evidently, though, they'd be shocked at the comparison: they shared the views of the little *figu-*



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*rante* before me. And my heart throbbed to pain as I thought of Henry.

"Some girls would go to the church and make a scene the day of the wedding," she went on, with a sharp, sidelong glance. "It would be a fine ad. for me too, a headliner for sure! But no, not with me! It's got to be all perfectly respectable and ladylike, or else —"

Géneviève came breathlessly into the room. "I hear the ladies returning, Mademoiselle, and I think I see Madame Cobb with them —"

"Then I'm going," cried Miss Fay Martin, picking up her long-handled parasol. "I certainly don't want to meet Mrs. Cobb — no, no scenes for me! But, Mademoiselle, I appeal to you ardently, earnestly, as one woman to another —"

Her hand was on her heart: one could see that she fancied herself on the stage, with a great scene to play, in spite of her expressed distaste for them. But in spite of her fantastic vanity, there was in her voice a new throb of sincerity that touched me with sudden respect. Whether it was for his good looks or his millions, it was perfectly obvious that she wanted to marry Victor Cobb. And that any one should want him, actually want him

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and not be able to have him — *Mon Dieu!* it seemed really a pity!

“Madame Cobb is coming!” whispered Gèneviève, peeping through the half-closed door.

“So long, Mademoiselle,” said Miss Fay Martin, and in spite of her dread of a scene she marched determinedly straight out of the door.

Half in terror, half in a dim kind of hope, I listened for a possible encounter; but I heard only the light fall of steps, the soft swish of silk. And a moment later, in an eruption of plumes, satin, and perfume, my future mother-in-law burst into the room.

## CHAPTER XIII

WITHOUT even stopping to kiss my cheek according to custom, Mrs. Cobb addressed me breathlessly, "Who was that, Lili, that I met at the door?"

Suddenly out of the half-finished interview with Miss Martin, vague and indeterminate as it had been, rose the dawning idea of intoxicating possibilities. Fixing Mrs. Cobb with my eyes, I answered her with the plain truth, in the slowest and most impressive manner of which I was capable:—

"That," I said, "was the young actress of whom you have told me, with whom your son is in love!"

"Fay!" she gasped, and collapsed on the sofa.

"Yes," I answered.

"I knew it!" she cried violently. "Something told me so! That is, I recognized her photographs. Victor's room is plastered with them—that is, *was*, before he became engaged to you!"

## HER WORD OF HONOR

And now back she comes ! What did the hussy want ?”

Again I served myself of the plain truth. “ She came,” I answered succinctly, “ to beg me not to marry Victor, because she is in love with him and he is in love with her !”

Mrs. Cobb’s face, beneath the sweeping hat with its immense emerald plumes, turned an almost similar tint. Little pale green reflections appeared at her nostrils, at the corners of her nicely reddened lips. It almost seemed as if the blood had stood suddenly still, congealed by the same obstacle that threatened the master passions of her heart.

“ What did you answer ?” she asked in a choked voice.

If I was to obtain any benefit from the complications suddenly opened before me, it was plain that frank truth-telling must have its limits. I responded guardedly : —

“ Madame, I had no time to answer. She made her petition to me, she heard you coming, and she ran away.”

“ But what would you have answered ?”

Now, if there is a set of persons for whom I

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have little sympathy, it is those heroines of romance who, for lack of one lucid word at the proper moment, let their lives and everybody else's slide into the ditch. After all, Mrs. Cobb had not shown so much delicacy toward me, when I was in her power, that I need be afraid to speak openly at least. And a sudden rage boiled up in me at the thought of the helpless tangle in which, by her greedy scheming and the caprice of Fate, I was now placed. At least, and for this moment that Destiny had placed a weapon in my hands, I would fight.

"Dear Madame," I answered with the utmost sweetness, "did you ever know of a French person who would willingly keep two loving hearts apart?"

She stared at me in a dazed kind of way. Evidently this was not the kind of response she had expected; so I pursued my advantage by adding:—

"How that poor girl loves your son, Madame! *Mon Dieu!* How she loves him!"

But — ah! that was where Lili, thinking to be so clever, over-reached her mark. Mrs. Cobb snorted, actually snorted, like a cabhorse in cold weather.

## HER WORD OF HONOR

"Loves him! Of course she does! I should think she might love him — a boy like my Victor!"

"But he loves her!" I cried, desperate at my lost advantage.

"He'll love his wife," she retorted grimly, "or I'll know the reason why!"

"His wife!" The words fell cold on my ears, and my heart swelled in the courage of desperation. "Madame," I said, "before the proposed steps are made irrevocable, would it not be best that we have a moment's frank conversation together?"

"As many as you like," she answered; "though, upon my word, I can't imagine what there is to be said on the subject!" And she nodded her head as though there was nothing more to be added.

"Nothing more," I cried, "when everything is so changed since that day on the steamer when we arranged everything?"

"What?" she said, with a black look. "I haven't changed!"

"Nor I," I answered steadily. Then, "Yes," I cried, "I have! In those days I was a French girl — for my months in England, they don't



## HER WORD OF HONOR

count — just a little white goose who didn't understand anything and looked forward to an arranged marriage as the most natural, inevitable thing in the world. To be sure, there were special circumstances that made me hesitate; but the whole idea of the thing, to marry the husband that had been picked out for me by some one older and wiser than myself — why, I had never thought of anything else! But now, though I'm as French as ever, — yes, though I live to be old like the world itself, my dear France must always come first, — yet I begin to feel myself a little bit American, too. They please me so, your Americans, — the way they talk, the way they think, the way they arrange things! And, whether I want to or not, I can't help looking at things the way you do, you others. That you must know and love your husband before marrying him: that's the American idea, isn't it? Well, Madame, it begins to be mine as well!"

"All right," responded Mrs. Cobb, "if you haven't got to know your fiancé, I'm sure it's your own fault, living right under the same roof with him — properly chaperoned, of course. And as for loving him — ah, my handsome bo-oy!"

## HER WORD OF HONOR

“Certainly,” I answered, “that poor young girl who was here just now — she loves him, indeed !”

“And you, Lili ?” Then, as I did not answer, she rose and came toward me. It seemed to me that she bristled visibly, like a cat whose kitten is threatened. “Do — you — love — Victor — or — don’t — you — Elise ?” she asked, hammering on each word as though it were a nail.

In the face of that maternal onslaught who could dare to tell the truth ? I fumbled confusedly for my answer. “Love him ? Why, it depends on just what you mean by the word. If you speak of *amour*, if you mean to ask me if I am really in love with your son —”

Mrs. Cobb brought her hand down on the little table beside my sofa with a slap that made the bottles ring. Suddenly her aspect changed, her under jaw advanced, through the open door of her roused passion one beheld suddenly step forward the girl whose father had sold drinks to working-men over a bar, and who fought her way upward to this ladyhood.

“Love !” she cried in withering accents. “Who in time’s talking about love, anyway ?

## HER WORD OF HONOR

We're not talking squush : we're talking business ! When we made our arrangements, was the word ever so much as mentioned between us ? Did any one ever so much as think of it until this little idiot of a chorus girl butted in with her silly stage rot, filling your head with these vulgar new ideas which, as you yourself confess, are quite contrary to your education ? Why, did you ever for an instant dream of questioning the present arrangements till that confounded young trouble-maker came ? How did she come ? How did she get in, anyway ? In a properly conducted house she couldn't have put foot over the threshold. I must say, I'm surprised at Mrs. Stuart —"

"Dear Madame," I interrupted in a sudden agony, "please, please ! The door is open — if any one should hear —"

Mrs. Cobb, thus cut short in her flood of eloquence, surveyed me with suddenly penetrating eyes. In spite of myself, I felt the blood rush to my cheeks. Those metallic blue eyes, fixed upon me, seemed to bore through to the utmost secret of my soul.

"You seem singularly upset, Lili," she said. "I wonder why ?" And walking to the door,

## HER WORD OF HONOR

she closed it softly. Then coming back to my sofa: "I'm on," she said in strained accents. "I'm jolly well on now! You're afraid some one will hear me talking about Mrs. Stuart. Who's *some one*, I wonder?"

Her voice was husky, her eyes suffused. For the first time since our days on the steamer, when she divulged to me her worries about her beloved son, I beheld this adroit schemer and intrepid champion really show the signs of inward commotion.

"These new romantic views," she said, "these sudden doubts about your marriage — and pretending to me it was all for the sake of Victor! Look here, I want the truth! Have you gone and fallen in love with this Harry Stuart?"

What a question! If the mere thought of this new emotion, unowned in the depths of my heart, had made me quiver with alternate bliss and terror, think how disconcerting it was to hear this inward mystery suddenly shaped in these crude words, and flung into my teeth! I could not answer. Like a silly little imbecile, I hid my face in my hands.

"Well," said Mrs. Cobb, in a dry tone, "that's

## HER WORD OF HONOR

a pity, for you and for my bo-oy. But I can't see that a sudden whim on your part is in any way to affect existing arrangements."

For the first time, before those words of finality, there rushed into my mind the vision of what "existing arrangements" meant. Victor Cobb, the husband of Lili, the center of the world and of the house, the arbiter of destiny and of every day's doings, the father of Lili's children, the companion of Lili's youth and of her old age! That blustering voice, those freckled and hairy hands! No, I couldn't, I couldn't! And there flashed into my mind the thought of "Lucia di Lammermoor" that I once saw at the Opéra Comique, and Lucia, who takes a dagger to her room on her wedding night.

"Mrs. Cobb," I said, in a little weeping voice, "please don't make me marry Victor! He loves somebody else. And I — yes, I love somebody else, too. And if you make us marry each other, I can assure you that we'll both be perfectly miserable!"

"And your word," responded she, "your word that you gave me and I accepted, when I picked you up out of the mess you'd got yourself into,

## HER WORD OF HONOR

and took you in like a daughter? Ah! you were glad enough of me then; you cried at the very notion of going back to your aunt, who snubs you, no doubt! You couldn't find the lady you'd come to visit —"

"But Mrs. Stuart is she!" I cried desperately. "She recognized my name almost immediately. It's she that knew my — my family, when she was a young girl in France. The letters, the miniature, they were hers! It was she, don't you understand, that I came to America to find —"

"Only you didn't," interrupted Mrs. Cobb, with violence. "You found me instead, and glad enough you were to profit by the chance and to work me for a good thing! So, weak fool that I was, I took your promise in gospel earnest, and opened my heart to you, and spent thousands of dollars on you, and trumpeted your name all over the country, and gave you my darling boy, the only child I've got, for your husband! And at the last moment, just because a young man turns up that you think sweller than my Victor, you renig! You go off and leave us in the lurch when the cards are out for the church, and the Duchess already on the water!"



## HER WORD OF HONOR

And here, before I could even open my mouth to reply, she amazed me by sinking on her knees beside my sofa. The tears started up in her eyes and made channels down her discreet rouge, her voice fell from anger to pleading, and I saw my adversary become my suppliant.

“Dear little Lili,” she said passionately, “my dear little daughter as I hope you’ll be, I do earnestly beseech you, and with my whole heart, don’t go back on me now ! If when you first knew me I was distracted at the idea of my boy, with his life before him, ruining everything by tying himself to that vulgar little adventuress, think what it would mean to me now, if you desert me ! I’ll own to you frankly I’ve made the most of this alliance and the Duchess and all, to push myself into the best set — and I’ve got there ! I’ve got there — almost ! For the little supper at Sherry’s on the night of the Duchess’s arrival I’ve got acceptances that represent the very cream of America, coming up from Newport and from this place on purpose — people that wouldn’t accept diamonds from me, I own it frankly, if it weren’t for you and your aunt. And for the wedding breakfast — well, the list of acceptances would

## HER WORD OF HONOR

bring tears to your eyes. I tell you for me it means success — my master stroke carried to a masterly finish! And the wedding presents, the silver and jewelry that's been arriving at the house since you've been gone, — if you could see those rows and rows of plush cases, I really think they'd melt your heart! And then the cards on them — it's like the whole of Tiffany's, with the Social Register attached! Good Lord, Lili! don't tell me to send them back again! Don't tell me to issue cards, 'The marriage has been indefinitely postponed,' while the bride goes off and marries Mr. Harry Mecklenburg Stuart. And Victor and me, we could go off and hang ourselves; for never, never could we show our heads in New York or in this place, either, after being made public laughing-stocks like that. And my son, fallen back into the clutches of that little fiend of a chorus girl! Oh, Lili, think of it, think of it! To climb so high, only to fall back lower than I was at the beginning, so low, so low that never can I ever hope to climb up again!" She actually sobbed on my shoulder — she, the hard, the interested, the inflexible.

"Oh, Lili, keep your word to me! Oh, Lili,



“ ‘Madame,’ I said, ‘don’t be afraid. Since you claim my word, I will keep it!’ ” Page 183.



## HER WORD OF HONOR

I do beg and beseech you, don't go back on me now !”

Where her threats might have left a loophole of escape, her tears left me powerless. After all, had I not promised ? And from the word once given there could be no escape. “Madame,” I said, “don't be afraid. Since you claim my word, I will keep it !”

In spite of my best resolution the words gulped in my throat with a sob. And, just to give myself courage, I touched the locket at my throat — the dear locket that, after bringing me my beloved new friends, now sentenced me to leave them forever. For what did it say, the motto of the Vauquières coat of arms, delicately engraved there on that pale ancient gold ?

“*Vauquières tient parole.*” Yes, what had been said of the first Vauquières should also be said of the last and least. It was drama, if you like ; but in a difficult moment in life, to fix one's eyes upon the stars may help one to wade through the mud. And the thought of the Vauquières who had given his life as hostage to the Duke of Burgundy rather than walk out of an open door, of the other Vauquières who had gone to the guillo-

## HER WORD OF HONOR

tine because he held to the family motto and kept his word — why, these things, a little theatrical if you like, helped me to clench my teeth and keep the pledge that I had given. Yes, I had given my promise, there was no doubt about that. And as long as Mrs. Cobb chose to hold me to my word, no power in heaven or on earth could save me from being a liar and a traitor and a disgrace to the family if I took it back again.

As for Mrs. Cobb, no sooner had she heard my last words than she sprang to her feet with surprising agility and as gay as a lark.

“Now that’s settled,” she cried, “and since it could only disturb him if he knew it, we won’t say a word to Victor about this — er — Fay’s visit, will we, dear?”

“Certainly not, if you wish it, Madame.”

She drew a long breath of relief. “Good!” she said. “My precious child, I promise you that I shall never forget your honorable conduct. What clothes, what automobiles, what jewels you shall have! Your new parure of sapphires has arrived since you have been gone. Wait till you see it — if that doesn’t console you, I don’t know what can! Then there’s a big box



## HER WORD OF HONOR

of chocolate marrons — and your wedding veil with a border of Brussels point from the same woman who makes for the Queen of England. And then Victor is waiting for you. After so nearly losing you the other day, I can assure you the dear boy is learning to appreciate you, and is most anxious to see you, most anxious ! And as for love, my dear, you will find that it comes with marriage. You'll love your husband, never fear. And when I have some dear little grandchildren — ”

Ah, Sacred Virgin ! *That* — never, I humbly petition and pray !

When one is going to be guillotined, it's better to put one's head on the block at once and be done with it. So I put out my hand to touch the bell.

“ G  nevi  ve,” I said, when my old nurse appeared, “ you may pack my trunks immediately. And will you tell the maid of Madame Stuart to ask Madame if I may come to her room and say good-by, as Mrs. Cobb has come to take me home ! ”

But no ! Mrs. Stuart, arriving five minutes later, brought all her delicate but firm insistence against this decision. See how droll it is, the life !

## HER WORD OF HONOR

Here was Lili, who a few short months ago had been the poor relation, the burden, the young person continually called by every one and truly wanted by no one — here she was elevated into the position of the Prize, struggled for by two beautifully dressed ladies with diamonds in their ears ! For Mrs. Cobb, who ordinarily would no more have resisted the great Mrs. Mecklenburg Stuart than I would the Holy Father at Rome, was bold with the strength of fear. She had captured me safe ; if she left me here in the very jaws of the enemy, was it not doubtful whether she should ever regain her quarry ? Her thought was so plain I could not help smiling to myself in a sour kind of way. My smile, however, became more genuine as I heard Mrs. Stuart, dear, kind friend, clench the matter by inviting Mrs. Cobb to come back to dinner with her son, quite *en famille*.

“ I think my boy Henry knew your son at Harvard,” she said sweetly. “ He will be delighted to see him again. Then after dinner I will give this dear child back to you and you shall take her home. There, everything’s nicely arranged, isn’t it ? Till half past eight, don’t forget ! *Au revoir*, dear Mrs. Cobb.”

## CHAPTER XIV

**H**AD I known what was coming, would I have stayed? Having fought my way through fiery trials like the saints of old, would I have remained for the last and cruelest temptation of all? Though, perhaps — *Mon Dieu!* how weak we are when we try to be strongest! — perhaps I knew it was coming, and hoped for it, and longed for it.

Mrs. Stuart, with that sweet little air that she has sometimes, which makes her seem always like another girl, came and sat down beside me on the sofa.

“Well, well!” she said. “And so I won out! Ah! Don’t I wish that I could win for good and all, and keep you here forever!” Suddenly a new expression came into the blue eyes that looked at me so kindly from under the coronet of white hair, an expression at once whimsical and serious yet full of tender inquiry.

“It’s too late, I suppose,” she said, “to talk of that?”

## HER WORD OF HONOR

She took my hand between the two of hers. I turned away my head. All I could find to say was : —

“ I am to be married the — the tenth of August.”

All at once I felt the kind clasp on my hands thrill to a sharp grip, and the blue eyes were brought very close to mine as their owner said : —

“ Listen, Lili ! I’m an old lady, I don’t count as a woman any more. And what’s past and done with, dead and buried, — oh, hundreds of years before you were born, — we may speak of together once, just once, may we not ? And, Lili, it will be the first time that I have ever spoken of these things to any one, of these things that lie in the very middle of my heart — the first time to any one in my whole life !”

A long sigh broke from her lips, as though the confining bands were indeed burst from her heart. And the blood, released, flew to her delicate, pale face, transfiguring it with the same look of youth that I had seen there the other day, when she spoke of my papa.

“ Lili, I loved your father. Never in my whole life have I loved any one as I loved him, except

## HER WORD OF HONOR

my dear Henry — my dear boy ! But — oh, Étienne was different ! There's one evening I remember, when I ran away from my old governess and met him by the river —”

Her eyes suddenly enlarged themselves, and were fixed on that sweet vision of a long-dead past. Ah, that evening by the river when my papa and Harriet were young ! Perhaps it wasn't very loyal to mamma, but — oh, I did feel sorry for them !

Mrs. Stuart went on : “ But I wasn't strong enough to deserve so much happiness, you see. I'm weak, and always was. So, when we heard that Étienne was dead, when we came back to New York, and met Mr. Stuart, and my father and mother urged me — you know how families can urge, Lili ? — at last I gave in. I married him, and he was always very kind to me, till he died ten years ago. But — oh, Lili ! ” she cried, “ oh, my dear little girl that might have been my daughter, who so nearly was, to you, without disloyalty to him who's gone, for once in my life I open my heart and say : Don't marry a man you don't love ! It doesn't matter if he's kind to you, it only makes it worse ; you can't have even the

## HER WORD OF HONOR

satisfaction of hating him — you hate yourself ! You hate life ! Life ! What is it to the woman who has married the wrong man ? Oh, the degradation ! The daily, hourly intimacy —”

She suddenly stopped, carrying her hand to her mouth to check the uncontrollable flood of self-revelation. Then : —

“ Lili,” she said, “ if I tell you this, it’s only to make you understand — you, an inexperienced child, taking the greatest step in life — understand something of what you are doing. You have no mother, you are far from all your relatives : this little scrap of loyalty at least I can show to my dear lost friend, and take for a few minutes a mother’s place towards his little daughter. So I’m going to ask you to show me your heart as I’ve shown you mine, and answer the absolute truth to my question. Lili, do you love this Victor Cobb as you should love the man who is to be your husband ?”

- To have some one thinking of me, — of me, Lili ! — not for the advantage they might gain out of me, but with thoughts of kindness and for my happiness — it was so long since it had happened to me. It seemed so unexpected and so



## HER WORD OF HONOR

strange, that in the mere soothing sweetness of the sensation I quite forgot my troubles, like a little child cuddled up in its mother's arms. Mrs. Stuart repeated her question. I turned away my head.

"You forget," I answered in a low tone, "that I am French. In my country, dear Madame, we make marriage for suitability, not for love—"

"You are French," she said; "but you are your father's daughter. You don't resemble him, perhaps; but you have his eyes, and when I look into them, it seems to me that it's his soul that looks back at me." Her touch tightened convulsively on my hand. Is it this way, then, I asked myself, when one loves, that even after forty years one's very body remembers? Whether or not she read this thought, certainly she understood the terror of it as it passed over my face. "Yes," she cried, "you have his nature, everything in him that made you love him, and be proud of him, and always afraid of hurting his feelings—as you were, weren't you?"

"Yes, yes," I answered breathlessly. "Yes, indeed!"

"Well, dear child, you may believe me who

## HER WORD OF HONOR

knew and loved him in the past, and who now know and love his little daughter, — what he couldn't have borne, you won't be able to bear ! Lili, just because you are his daughter, you are a woman who cannot sell herself for an establishment without paying more than the finest establishment is worth. And unless you love this young man you are going to marry as a wife should love her husband, as — excuse my frankness — I find it difficult to believe that you love him —”

“ Oh !” I cried, unable to bear any more. “ Please, don't say I'm selling myself for an establishment ! Please, don't think I'm that kind of mercenary person ! You see, the circumstances were so very special —” And before I realized what I was doing, because she was Harriet who had known papa, because she had spoken to me so kindly, or just because my heart was bursting and had to take a little natural relief, before I knew what I was saying I had told her everything, — all my life at Brent with Aunt Elizabeth and the girls who didn't want me ; all about my little inheritance and my idea of coming to America to hunt for her ; then my despair on

## HER WORD OF HONOR

arriving in New York, of Mrs. Cobb's offer, of the compact we had made —

“But, no, that's impossible!” interrupted Mrs. Stuart. “She forced you into such a bargain, you, unprotected and alone!”

This was the thought that sometimes came to me in my moments of rebellion; and to hear it thus stated in tones of sweet compassion filled me with self-pity almost to the point of tears. Then, whether it's the spirit of philosophy I have tried to cultivate or just the necessity of truth that my race has always put before everything, I was obliged to respond in a juster spirit: —

“Yes, Mrs. Stuart, you can put it that way,” I cried; “yet — I'm bound to own it — there's another side to the question, too! She didn't force me into the bargain: I was free to go back to England if I chose. Aunt Elizabeth had wired for me, and my return passage and G nevi ve's were already taken. But I didn't choose to go back. I wanted to stay in America; and the life Mrs. Cobb offered me, all petting and diamonds and beautiful clothes — it seemed ideal. To be sure, the husband added to the bargain — I did

## HER WORD OF HONOR

hesitate a moment for that. But only a moment — what else, after all, had I looked forward to, and what would have been my marriage if papa had lived? — ‘Monsieur has so many thousand francs of fortune, Mademoiselle is the daughter of a Marquis and has so many thousand francs of dowry!’ And here was a husband who was willing to take me without a sou of dowry. If Mrs. Cobb was willing to take recompense from my name and my relatives, instead of from the fortune I didn’t have, could I be anything but relieved and glad? And, after all, giving me her son for my husband, whether one agrees with her or not about his qualities, still one must confess she certainly had no idea of wronging me there! For, after all, Victor is her son. And, though I haven’t any children myself, still I sometimes fancy I can imagine how children seem to their own mother —”

Mrs. Stuart stroked my hand, and it seemed to me for a moment that I saw tears in her eyes.

“Funny little Lili,” she said, “dear little Lili! A dear little name, for a dear little girl! Yes, you are right, children do seem like that to their mother. Even Henry, you see, to me —”

## HER WORD OF HONOR

“But — ah, Henry!” I cried. “He’s different!”

I felt her eyes on me, penetrating, infinitely kind. Then, as I raised my eyes to meet them, I knew that my voice, in these two or three words, had betrayed my secret; for the glance that I met looked through and through me, to the very inmost part of my soul, even past the thought of my dear papa, to where nothing lives but the thought of Henry. Henry! All day long, when I’m awake and when I’m sleeping, he’s there in my dreams! So, as I know that she knew already, I just let everything come into my eyes, — all my longing, all my struggles, all my hope that knew itself hopeless.

“This is an odd complication,” she said in a changed voice, hesitating and tender. “Will you — will you let me tell Henry? He’s a lawyer, as you know. He’s very clever at it. I’ve known him to unravel the most extraordinary affairs. May I tell him?”

“No!” I cried. Then I paused to think. Was my refusal delicacy, was it Quixotism? And in any case was not one reason more foolish than the other, if a way of escape could be pointed out?

## HER WORD OF HONOR

“Yes!” I changed my negative. “Tell him, please. But — oh, dear Mrs. Stuart!” I cried with a sudden thought, “no one else, please! Imagine if people heard about a bargain, or coercion, or anything like that — where would be the social advantage that Mrs. Cobb hoped to gain from the marriage, which it’s only fair she should have, because she’s paid for it? So not a word, please!”

Mrs. Stuart stroked my cheek — what a soft hand, what a tender touch! “Yes,” she said, “you’re Étienne’s daughter, one can see that, — the same delicate scruples, the same fine sense of honor!”

“And yet,” I cried in a weeping voice, “we’re trying to find a way out for me to break my word!”

She seemed perplexed. “No,” she said, “I could never advise any one to break their word. But, you see, I can’t help feeling that I have the first right to you; for it was to find me that you came to America, after all. Think of it!” She looked at me as if overcome by the thought. “You came to find me! Étienne’s daughter looking for me, and I wasn’t there! Oh, you



## HER WORD OF HONOR

dear little thing, if I had been there ! No, it's too cruel that we should find each other too late ; it mustn't be too late ! Lili, you belong to me ; I won't give you up ! I won't let you marry that loutish young Cobb — never, never ! But, never fear, Henry will find a way out.' He's so clever, Henry !”

She bent her face suddenly down close to mine. “ You do like Henry, don't you, my dear little daughter ?” she whispered.

“ Yes,” I answered under my breath. And our eyes met.

What our words meant, I could not doubt. She had offered her son to me for my husband, and I had accepted him. But with how perfect a delicacy, how different from that other mother two months ago !

But how strange a country it is, America, where no one ever thinks of money, and where all the mothers want Lili, black as a mole, and without a penny of dowry, to be their daughter-in-law !

At least here in two months it had happened twice — and, alas ! in this last case I knew that the son wanted me and I wanted — oh, I wanted him !

## HER WORD OF HONOR

Was the temptation going to be too great, after all? Was this last of all the Vauquières going to be separated from her family traditions as she had already been separated from France? Was she going to find her strength insufficient to keep her plighted word? What disgrace — oh, what black disgrace!

And yet I wanted Henry, wanted him with every bit of me, in strange new ways, with strange wild feelings that I had never suspected until I fell in love, and which perhaps — perhaps, will be stronger than the best strength of my soul.

Why, when I had had the force to renew my promise to Mrs. Cobb, did I walk straight back into temptation and give myself the whole battle to fight over again? In that moment I wished sincerely and with all my heart that I had gone home with Mrs. Cobb.

“So, now, Lili, as Henry is waiting to take us out in the motor, I’ll just ring for G  nevi  ve, And in the hour before dinner when we get home I’ll tell Henry all about it. He’ll find a way out, you’ll see. Though he is my son, I really must own that he’s extraordinarily clever!”

## CHAPTER XV

**I**T has been like a gladiatorial combat, with the little brown hand of Lili as the prize. The struggle proceeds progressively, — in the afternoon, the two mothers; in the evening, the two sons.

At dinner, Mrs. Stuart, with her usual delicacy and attention to the rights of others, put me beside my fiancé. Though she had spoken of an informal family dinner, still (as usual, I find, in America when they use that expression) we were quite a large party. The Cobbs, Mrs. Vanhuysen, and Miss Carroll, with two or three friends that they had invited, another two or three of Henry's friends, — all together we made no small tableful. Henry, on the other side of the table, was obliged to be very attentive to an important old lady, invited by his aunt; so, between this fact and the hum of general conversation, and the flowers with which the table was heaped, I remained quite at liberty with my fiancé — free to exchange with

## HER WORD OF HONOR

him if I chose all those tender nothings that two persons in our interesting circumstances might be supposed to be murmuring after an enforced separation.

To do him justice, Victor appeared to greater advantage than I had ever seen him, except the day of the *aéroplane* meet. Apparently he was conscious of the fact that he had not distinguished himself the other day, and was anxious to create a more dashing impression.

“Corking clams!” he said.

Ah, those dreadful little shellfish, always there with their taste of tears when my heart was sad!

“Excellent!” I answered. But I couldn’t eat them, for all that.

Victor, as though delighted with his success, continued the conversation. “I say, you look corking yourself to-night,” and as his blue eyes ran up and down me suddenly there came into them for the flash of a moment that look which the first evening had chilled my blood with indefinable repulsion, — those eyes of the Sultan who has bought and paid for so many pounds of flesh, and means to have the worth of his money. “You’ve got a corking neck, Lili,” he was good

## HER WORD OF HONOR

enough to add, "and that little blue dress is out of sight! Is it one of the — er —"

"No," I hastened to answer. "I don't wear those till — er —"

He nodded. "Till afterwards. No, of course not!" he said.

And we were silent for a moment, while a desperate resolution formed itself within me. Instead of beseeching the mercy of Mrs. Cobb, who could know none, instead of waiting for the "extraordinarily clever way out of it" that Henry's mother knew he'd find and I knew he never could, why not do what I should have done long ago and address myself directly to headquarters? After all, the young man beside me wanted to marry me no more than I wanted to marry him. Except for the caprice of gratified vanity or other feeling more ephemeral, except for the pleasure of ticketing publicly as his own the girl who perhaps — perhaps — other people might want too, what interest could he have in me? And if what the other girl had said this afternoon were true, then his interest in breaking off this impossible marriage was perhaps almost — not quite, but almost — as strong as mine.

## HER WORD OF HONOR

In that moment I realized how effective a weapon Mrs. Cobb had plucked from my hand, in obtaining my promise not to tell Victor that Fay was in town and had come to see me that afternoon.

My mother-in-law, placed at some distance from me, surveyed the interesting pair we made with a smile of encouraging delight. She was all sparkle to-night, — diamonds, teeth, and eyes radiating together the immensity of her satisfaction at finding herself among such company, seated at such a table, toward which with all the fierce intensity of her ambition she had struggled for twenty years. Her triumph founded on my despair! It seemed to me that my very stomach boiled in rebellion. I could not eat. No, I must have it out with Victor, then and there, without waiting another minute. If I had needed extra courage, it would have been given me by Henry's eyes, which every now and then, with a strange, burning look, met mine across the flowers.

There was a sudden burst of laughter as Miss Carroll, at the other end of the table, began giving imitations of a London coster girl. So, under cover of this diversion, I turned to my fiancé.

"Victor," I said, "there's something we've



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never talked over together. Don't you think it's about time, before it's too late?"

"What?" he asked, with a surprised stare of his round, blue eyes. "If you mean the upset the other day, it wasn't my fault. It was the boat's. She's crank. A regular tub. I've written to order a new one —"

"Oh, I don't mean the boat!" I cried; then lowering my voice: "Victor," I said, "don't you realize we're to be married in a few days? Tell me frankly, what do you think of it, this marriage?"

Victor picked up his champagne glass and took a nervous sip or two before he turned to me. His face was flushed, his eyes surveyed me doggedly.

"I'm a good little boy, I don't think. I just mind when my mamma tells me to," he answered, with a kind of bitter grin; "and, besides, you're rather a looker yourself, as I suppose you know, Lili?" And again his glance traveled from my neck to an orchid in my hand, with that look I hate. But I forced myself to lean toward him with an air of the most affectionate concern.

"Thank you, dear Victor, for the compliment. But, you see, I have been given to understand

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that, even though you may feel a little bit kindly toward me, yet there's some one else that you really want to marry — that you really love, and who loves you —”

“Who? Fay?” He spoke quickly, almost loudly.

“Hush!” I murmured in alarm. “Your mother is listening to what we say, and this, you understand, must be quite between ourselves. Tell me, she's pretty, this Mademoiselle Fay?”

“She's a corker!” he replied, with a sudden spark of enthusiasm, as when he spoke of his pups or of things to eat. “She's the lively kind, you see — not your style at all, Lili. Blonde. Gauzy. Fuzzy. Gee! I don't know how to describe her; but she's an all right one, all right, anyhow.”

“She loves you very much?” I murmured into his ear.

Ours was in fact the most proper little interlude between a young pair in so interesting a situation, and the heads on each 'side of us 'were turned sympathetically away. Across the flowers I was conscious of Henry's eyes, grave and imploring.

“She loves you, Victor, very much?”

Into his face came that master-of-the-harem

## HER WORD OF HONOR

look that I find so odious — though less so for Fay, I will own, than for myself. “How sentimental you are, you French! Yes, poor little girl, there’s not much doubt about it. She’d leave her happy home for muh, all right, all right, if she got the chance!”

“Poor little thing!” my voice fairly dripped with tears. “And she’s not going to get the chance, after all?”

He turned a suspicious face on me. “What are you driving at, Lili?”

“Nothing,” I answered, with a candid sweetness, “only I wanted you to understand how deeply I feel for you in this sacrifice you’re called on to make, and if there’s anything I can do —”

“What can you do,” he returned sullenly, “except back out? And if you fancy that that’d help matters at this stage of the game, with the cards out for the church and the cake ordered —”

“But just let’s put it for the sake of argument; suppose I did, wouldn’t you be glad?” I asked, feeling my way.

“What?” he asked sharply. “Do you want to back out?”

*Mon Dieu!* I did not suppose I had so much

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guile in me. But I could plainly perceive, you see, that if he once got the notion in his head that I didn't want him, he might begin from pure contrariness to want me. So I made my eyes as sweet as possible and answered diplomatically:—

“If I agreed before I saw you, do you think it likely I'd want to back out after I've seen you? But I wasn't thinking of myself; I was thinking of you, Victor. And I know how contrary it is to the custom of your country that a young man should have his wife picked out for him by his mother—you, a free American citizen—”

“A free American citizen,” he replied, “with mother in the family? Let me laugh!” which he did, sardonically.

My heart, after the momentary elation, began to sink again. “Then your mother is very—er—masterful?” I asked.

He pursued his idea. “A free American citizen! Do you think father was one? Listen, I'll tell you about father. He was a crackerjack, father was. Started with a pick; cashed in for fifty millions, more or less. But this was how free he was: he cast his vote as he liked because momma

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couldn't follow him into the booth. — Policemen wouldn't let her. But at home — gee! There wasn't any policeman! Say, I'll tell you something I remember. When I was a kid in Butte, mother joined the Woman's Club and wanted two parlors; so she took father's room and rushed a plush suite into it. And father — where do you think she put him? There was a toolhouse in the garden she had papered and sent him to sleep there. It was funny to see him winter nights, throw down his *Evening News*, and light his lantern and start for bed with a snow shovel — to dig his way back to the house, you see, in case the snow fell heavy before morning — as it did, mostly. That was before he struck it rich. But a couple of years later he managed to scrape enough together to buy the Legislature at Helena, and have the railroad brought around by the Little Henrietta, his first copper mine. After that we moved to Chicago, and he slept in the house. But I guess he kind of missed the quiet of the toolhouse."

It was the first time I had ever heard Victor talk so much. And his discourse, though rambling, had a kind of awful pertinence that told me this

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way was closed. Launched on a topic where fluency was easy, Victor swept on : —

“ And here you strike the bottom of the whole mess, — father’s will. Hang it ! I oughtn’t to blame him, knowing mother ! But it was tough on me ; a rotten shame, that’s what it was ! Did you ever hear of father’s will ? It went the round of the world, — fifty millions, disposed of in fifteen words : ‘ I leave all my property, real and personal, to my beloved wife, Henrietta McNabb Cobb ! ’ A peach of a will, when he had a son, wasn’t it ? But he made it, — sound mind, witnesses, signs, seals, and everything. So when mother says, ‘ Come ! ’ I come. When she says, ‘ Get out ! ’ I get. And when she says, ‘ Crawl ! ’ why — darn it — ”

And as the butler filled his glass again with champagne he interrupted himself to drain it to the bottom. His eyes took on a kind of dull sparkle, his voice fell to accents of acute self-pity, as he went on : —

“ It’s hard on me. That’s what it is, it’s rotten hard on me ! Look here, I’ll own to you frankly : I’m not stuck on you, Lili ! You’re a corking girl ; but I’m not stuck on the idea of marrying



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you ! I'm stuck on Fay. She's a — she's a bird, that's what she is ! But what's the use ? Mother's got the screws on me, for fair. I'm the son of a millionaire ; but I can't pay a car-fare or buy a bag of peanuts without running and asking mamma for a nickel, like a two-year-old. So, when she chooses to use me for her bug —”

“ What ? ” I cried.

He snorted. “ Don't you know, as well as I do, mother's got a bug ? ”

My eye went to the lady in question, immaculate in her gray lace, her shoulders shining under their enamel. Victor burst out into a grim guffaw.

“ I see you don't understand United States yet ! Mother's bug, you know. What's biting her, I mean. This society business, don't you understand ? ”

“ Ah ! ” I nodded, understanding. “ Yes, I've noticed your mother adores the *monde* . ”

“ The what ? Oh, yes, the society game. Adore it ? She'd kill herself for it ! That's the way she killed father. Carried him to Chicago, then to New York, cooped him up till he got liver complaint and just went off. And glad enough, poor old boy, I'll bet ! What did he care about the

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Vandergilts? But mother! She'd let herself be torn to pieces by wild mustangs, if one of them would speak to her. It's the Four Hundred or bust for her! That's what this marrying game is for, you see! And it's a good one, all right, all right. This time, mother's made a home run. Gee! you ought to see the cards with some of the wedding presents! It's your aunt the Duchess and all that that's done it. Whereas, if I married Fay —"

"Yes, if you married that dear little Fay," I said breathlessly.

"Fay's a perfect lady, understand. She doesn't really have to work, only she's a passion for the stage. She's as straight as a string, too; it's the parson or by-by Charley for her, as she has said a hundred times. And when I'm married, she says I can ring her doorbell all day long, she'll never open enough for me to put my nose in. And she'll stick to it. Ah!" he sighed heavily, and attacked the pressed duck on his plate.

"Then, Victor," I whispered, "since Fay is such a noble girl, pure as she is beautiful, and since you love her so, why don't you go straight

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to your mother and say to her frankly: 'I'm a free American citizen. I claim the right to choose my wife for myself —'

"To mother?" he replied in withering tones. "You'd go to mother and talk like that, would you? If you think it'd be so easy, then try it for yourself — only I recommend you to get a rubber coat and a life insurance policy before you spring your little spiel! Watch me try it! I'd get rushed out the front door, and not another nickel would I get from her while she lives, and when she dies, her money goes to a lot of measly charities. Her money? Father's money — and his only son a beggar!" He applied himself again to the champagne, and his eyes seemed to take on a tearful look. "For that's what I'd be, Lili! What could I do to earn my living? I haven't been brought up to earn it. I can't start out all over again like father. Hang it! he wasn't a gentleman, and I am. I dress in a sweater sometimes, to tease mother; but, hang it! I've been to Harvard, and I've got expensive tastes. I can't live in a beastly Harlem boarding-house and swing to a strap every morning. I'd rather be dead — or marry you. So here goes!" And

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he put down his champagne glass with a deep sigh.

I echoed the sigh with a full sincerity. As I had feared, Victor was but a broken reed on which to lean. After all, I could not blame him. What else could his father's foolish will and his mother's tyrannical treatment make of him but this surly grown-up child, without character or individuality of his own except to reach out in a desperate lunge toward the fortune that should be his? And, after all, I couldn't blame Mrs. Cobb, either: she thought she was acting for his good as her own. Who knows? Perhaps she was. And, in any case, I couldn't reasonably expect either of them to think of me.

Nevertheless, my case was too desperate to be dropped without one more little attempt. "Victor," I whispered, "of course I see that if you broke up this marriage, your mother would never forgive you. But if I, just because you love Fay and she loves you —"

"If you broke it off, you mean?" said Victor, sharply. Suddenly his face changed; the blurred eyes, the puffy, indeterminate features lit with a sharp look of life, drew themselves to a keen point

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of concentration, — the same look that I remember to have seen on so many people's faces, on Aunt Elizabeth's, for instance, or the rector's at Brent when they speak of "money." And all in a flash, beneath the Victor of a moment ago, whom I had thought to understand, there existed another, however obscured by habits of self-indulgence and of dependence. The Victor on whom I looked now was the rightful son of the father who had battered that colossal fortune out of the world, and the mother whose single-handed ambition had placed her where I saw her to-night.

"Look here, Lili!" he said determinedly. "There's twenty-five million dollars more or less in question; do you understand that? Because it suits her purposes that I marry you, that's the sum that mother has promised to hand over to me on our wedding day, — half of father's fortune that ought to have been mine when I came of age. The deeds are all prepared — to be signed and sealed on the morning of the tenth before we drive to the church. She's handing over the whole P. & L. System to me, — twelve millions, they estimate it, — then a bunch of gold bonds, and a whole lot of little things, —



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an automobile factory, a race track in New Orleans, and so forth. Do you know what that means, Lili? Damn it! It means I'll be a man at last!" And he brought his fist down on the table so that the champagne leaped sparkling from his newly filled glass, and people on each side of us smiled discreetly as at a lover's quarrel.

"So there you have it, Lili," he concluded. "At the beginning perhaps it wouldn't have mattered; but now that things have gone so far — no, it'd be jumping from the frying pan into the fire. People'd give mother and me the geehee all around, if you threw us down at this stage of the game. We'd have to send the wedding presents back; we'd have to leave town. I tell you there'd be hell to pay all around! And I couldn't marry Fay, anyway — and I'd lose all that money!" His face turned pale and his voice shook in the intensity of his feeling. "Twenty-five millions! No, Lili, you can't go back on us now! I'll settle a million on you outright — two millions, if you like — but don't you go back on me now, for the Lord's sake!"

So that was all the satisfaction I got from Victor. My last card was played and lost. For Henry, even though he is so clever, what was there for him to do?



## CHAPTER XVI

I MUST own, however, that Henry's first move after dinner compelled my admiration. I saw him speaking for a moment with Miss Carroll. She's kind and pleasant, Miss Carroll, and not at all a flirt, as Aunt Elizabeth said. The next moment she came over to where Victor and I were standing together and invited us, so sweetly, to come and look at the collection of boats, models that Henry's father had left.

"There's every kind of punt and galley and junk that was ever invented, Mr. Cobb," she said, "and I rely on you to explain them all to me. I hear you're extraordinarily clever at that sort of thing."

Victor, bristling with gratified vanity, professed himself quite willing to act as the lady's teacher. So she invited two or three others to accompany them, and she managed so well that before I knew it Victor was holding forth to an attentive audience of girls at one end of a long,

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dimly lit gallery, and Henry and I were examining Sudanese jewelry at the other.

Henry looked at me coldly, and my heart sank. "You seemed very well entertained at dinner, Mademoiselle," he said.

Ah! I understood! He was jealous — jealous of Victor! I burst into unsteady laughter. "I was trying to persuade him — to refuse to marry me," I said.

He drew a long breath, and I saw by his face that he wanted to take me in his arms, as he had done that day in the water. The blood ran to my head; I felt all giddy and light and happy — oh, so wickedly, piercingly happy! We smiled at each other.

"I'm ridiculous, forgive me," he said; "but somehow, to see you with that fellow — Listen, Lili!" he interrupted himself hurriedly. "We have only a few moments to speak together and much to be said. You know what I feel toward you — don't you? These days that you have been my mother's guest, I have tried to respect you and your situation as another man's promised wife. It's been a tough struggle; but I've kept my mouth shut, haven't I? Haven't I? Look

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at this pendant! The carving of these turquoises is considered very remarkable!"

For a moment, as the conversation at the other end of the hall subsided, he thrust a large lump of a silver ornament into my hands. I touched it mechanically with a wandering finger. Ah! to be near Henry, to see his face and hear his voice, to speak with him at last heart open to heart!

"But to-night, Lili, my mother has come to me with the most extraordinary story, the most amazing! Listen! Have I understood it rightly? Is it true in the first place that mother knew your family long ago in France, and that you came to America with the single object of finding her?"

Ah, my family! Even to this son of hers she had not spoken of papa. No, the dear, long-dead past, I saw, was to remain forever a secret between Harriet and me. Somehow, the thought, striking through the confusion of the moment, drew me closer to her, nearer in spirit even, than to her son. Ah! the dear, dear friends that to-night I must leave forever!

"Listen, Lili. And is it true also that you

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are marrying this fellow Cobb only on account of a compact made with his mother before your arrival at New York, that if you could not find us, your friends, you would enter the house of Mrs. Cobb; that she should give you her protection and supply your needs, and that you in turn should marry her son?"

I felt my face burn with shame. How ugly it sounded, our bargain, how sordid, thus stated by the person whose respect I wanted more than any one else's in the world!

"Yes," I answered feebly, forcing myself to tell the truth, "that was our understanding. But please don't think too badly of me for consenting to it! You see, I had been brought up to ideas of marriage very different from those you have here, you other Americans. Oh, I've changed so much, I've learned so much, since I've been here in America! But then it seemed quite natural, and my duty besides, to accept the husband picked out for me by some one older and cleverer than I. To be sure, I had never seen him; but on the other hand he was willing to take me without a sou of dowry. That was my great difficulty, after all. You see, poor papa had mis-

## HER WORD OF HONOR

fortunes before he died — and there I was before New York, not knowing a single soul, with G nevi ve on my back, and only five hundred francs in the whole world !”

“Poor little girl !” Henry’s voice actually shook, and his eyes were — oh, so kind as he looked at me, but with something behind them that made me tremble, too ! “Poor beautiful little thing ! After all, you might have fallen into worse hands than Mrs. Cobb’s. But God knows, hers were bad enough ! Look here — this infamous compact, you are sure it was made on a German ship before your arrival at New York ?”

“It was made on the sea — in the harbor, before we landed.” I began to tremble ; what was coming now ?

“But on the steamer, I mean ? The conditions were explained to you, you had given your promise assenting to them *before* you left the ship, and not after ? The compact was made between you and Mrs. Cobb, that is, before your foot had touched American soil ?”

“Yes — yes !”

“Lili, come here !” It was Victor’s voice.

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I turned faint and ill with vexation; but what could I do? He advanced toward me with a little boat model in his hand. "Lili, see this junk! Isn't it a peach? Let's have one made for our wedding trip, instead of the *Brunhilda*, shall we?"

Victor was in great spirits, so much was plain. The champagne he had drunk, the thought of his approaching independence, Miss Carroll's beauty and obliging flatteries,—all these influences had combined to exalt him and make him very ready to claim me as his property before this roomful of people. Oh, the unhappiness, the degradation of that moment, as I realized that to his words as to his glance I had no choice but to submit, and smile submissively! *La belle Scheherazade*, they called me, did they? Never was Scheherazade half so much a slave as I, and by no recounting of a thousand tales, or a million either, could I hope ever, ever to be free!

But what, after all, was Henry on the point of telling me? I burned with impatience. I could have killed poor Victor at that moment, as he went on making his silly jokes about the junk and our Chinese honeymoon and the ragout of



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mouse we'd eat together — disgusting! But finally Miss Carroll, in response to an imploring glance from Henry, had the happy thought of proposing that Victor delight the company with a song.

“I've heard you sing the coster-songs most deliciously, Mr. Cobb. And I'll play your accompaniment. Is it a bargain?”

“Sure!” Victor, always ready to show off his voice, beamed with gratified vanity. Then, turning, “You come, Lili?”

It was his Sultan look and tone. I stood confused, daring neither to follow nor to stay behind. But Miss Carroll, the dear angel, showed herself a champion not easily defeated. She pouted enchantingly.

“No, Mr. Cobb, you've promised to sing *Dear Lizer* for me, and this time it's to be for *me* and not for your fiancée. I don't care if you are jealous, Mademoiselle. Besides, we are sometimes said to look alike; though perhaps I flatter myself too horribly. Would it be too much of a strain to make the illusion for five minutes, dear Mr. Cobb?”

“I'm coming, Victor!” I hastened to add.

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But Miss Carroll had already borne him off, hypnotized.

And in a moment the doleful strains of one of those abominable London songs came floating endlessly from a distant room. The other people one by one melted away. Henry leaned toward me.

"Listen, Lili! I have to tell you: such a contract as you entered into with Mrs. Cobb, and by which you fancy yourself bound, is by the laws of these United States entirely null and void!"

The room swam around me. I was conscious of Henry's hand upon my arm, holding me up. "What?" I gasped. "I'm free? You mean, my promise doesn't hold me? You mean—what do you mean?"

"I mean," he answered slowly and distinctly, so that I might understand every word, "that such an agreement as you describe is by American law utterly illegal, as Mrs. Cobb, the widow of a business man and a first-rate business woman herself, they say, ought to have known, indeed, probably did know. Did you never hear, Lili, of the Contract Labor Law?"

"No," I answered, shaking my head. But I

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clung to the impressive sounding word on Henry's lips, as the other day in the water I had clung to his arm. "No, I never did!"

"To be sure, how should you? But here in this country, Lili, we have a law forbidding an alien, before his arrival here, to enter into any contract whatsoever providing for his employment after he lands. That law, Lili, you broke!"

"Ah!" I shuddered. In the very thought of the law in any country, but especially in a strange one, there is something awful and imposing; and the idea that one has broken it — Was I, Lili, a lawbreaker? In proposing to keep my word and carrying out an obligation more repulsive than death, was it possible that I was offending the laws of this new country where I found myself, which already I loved so much? Oh, dear and blessed country where they make such laws! Oh, dear and happy thought which perhaps was to set me free! The idea glanced through my brain: Mrs. Stuart was right, more right than Mrs. Cobb about her son, when she said to me that Henry was "extraordinarily clever!" I began to speak incoherently.

"What? Is it true? The law is like that, is

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it? A contract entered into before landing in America? Yes, certainly we hadn't landed yet! But," a cold thought struck me, "you spoke of 'employment.' I just promised to marry Victor. Perhaps that wasn't employment, after all." My voice trailed away and broke into tears.

"For the employment of your time, for the disposal of your person, in return for a pecuniary compensation?" Henry returned with violence. "If that's not a contract of employment in its crudest sense, what is? You yourself own there was no question of sentiment on either side. Did Mrs. Cobb invite you to her house, offer you protection and maintenance, as an act of disinterested friendship; and then, as an act of friendship on your part, beg you to lend her your social influence, and offer you the opportunity of marriage with her son?"

I shook my head. "No, unless I gave my word of honor to marry Victor, and to get Aunt Elizabeth to present her at Court, there was not even question of my entering her door. But then I was a stranger to her — why should she bother —"

Henry interrupted me triumphantly. "You see! All the qualities of a contract, in their

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purest form. That is, the special action on each side was to be made wholly conditional on the performance of a certain specified action in the other. Unless you rendered her payment by entering her house, by giving her the disposal of your person, name, and social influence, and by marrying her son, she was not obliged to spend a single dollar on you. And you, on your side, unless she paid you by giving you your maintenance, — that is, your board, clothing, pocket money, traveling expenses, etc., — you were not to be obliged —”

“But, oh,” I cried, “she has!” In spite of my agony at the admission, the mere necessity of telling the truth tore the words from me. “She has! She’s kept her word to the last letter of it, and more! Look! These pearls, this blue satin dress, she gave me! She gave me my home here, my beautiful home, the automobiles that I go out in, the money in my purse, the very opportunity to meet you — you and your dear mother! She’s kept nothing back, not even her only son, which she thinks the finest present of all!” Beneath the tortured touch of my fingers, I felt my little lace handkerchief (another present from



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Mrs. Cobb; value a hundred francs) dissolving its fine-spun meshes into shreds. "Oh!" I cried, with tears, "when she has kept her part of the compact to the very letter, how can I refuse to perform mine?"

"For that very reason," answered Henry, with intensity. "Because the very fact that in return for what you have received from her, you yourself have a pledged duty to perform, proves the existence of a contract — and a contract, made in such circumstances as this one, is legally no contract at all; is, in fact, in and of itself, a grave offense against the laws of this land. Darling, don't you understand? The promise that held you is no promise at all. Your delicate scruples that do you so much honor are absolutely without basis in fact. You are free, dearest. Don't you understand, you are free?"

I stood stupidly, still with the great silver and turquoise ornament dangling from my hand. This, then, was the end? The strangling mesh that had held me — so lightly, so easily as this it was to be thrown off, after all? Here, then, was the goal toward which for so many sad weeks and by so many tortuous ways I had been traveling?





*"It seemed that my heart had stopped beating." Page 227.*



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After all the philosophy and the struggles and the tears, this was what had been waiting for me all the time — just Henry with his arms outstretched? I let the precious lump of silver go crash to the floor, and held out my two hands to him with a little cry.

“Oh, I love you!” I said. Probably it wasn’t right for me to speak that way, before he had said it. But I couldn’t help it, it was the truth. “Oh, I love you, I love you so!” I heard myself gasping, over and over again.

Henry glanced quickly round. In the long room we were alone together. The next instant I felt his arms around me, just like the other day. But this time there was no icy water crawling between us, nothing to keep us apart any more. For a moment he held me close — so close, it seemed that my heart had stopped beating, and my lips were no longer mine, but his.

Then, with a long sigh that seemed to tear all the breath from his body, he released me. “My beauty,” he said, “my precious, my own, my very own! Then it is settled, this other miserable business is over and done with, and you marry me?”

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Whether it was the law he had just expounded to me, or just the wordless influence of his lips, that tingled through my body like a strange drug, I cannot tell you. But my will power ran from me, the scruples that this afternoon had seemed so important were no longer more than an ancient prejudice, already outgrown and forgotten. In my whole being there was room for no more than one gigantic fact: I was Henry's and he was mine! My very arms knew him for mine, my very lips claimed him! Therefore, was not any idea which might keep me apart from him intrinsically wrong and false?

But I did not think all this; I only felt it. When we are very happy, I find that we do not think. And I was happy at last. Oh, divine revelation! Oh, wild and tender moment when Henry stood there beside me with the love in his eyes and bent my will to his own!

"Lili, say, 'I've been a little fool!'"

"I've been a little fool," I repeated breathlessly; then added, laughing at myself, "and it's true, too!"

"Such a darling, crazy little fool, with your scruples and your talk about compacts and

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promises and honor! I'll take care of your honor now, my little Lili! Listen, to-night you'll stay here with my mother? And to-morrow you'll marry me?"

"Oh! Oh!" I cried, and my laughter changed to a sob in my throat. Too much! Ah! was it not too much, if at the end of my long search I had at last found you, my husband, and you are Henry, after all?

"Yes. To-morrow morning we will telephone all over the island, if need be, till we find a minister to marry us, and a priest too, if you wish, darling. The more they marry us, the better! Then off in the auto — our auto, you remember it? — for New York. Then on the first steamer that has places vacant for us, we sail for France. You'll like that, my little love?"

"Oh! Oh!" I could only gasp. He was too good and I was too happy!

"Then that's settled. I'll tell Adams immediately to get New York to-morrow morning, the very instant that the agency opens, to engage our suite. And in New York you can buy whatever you need for your trip. For you keep nothing, that's understood, that that woman gave you!"

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“Ah! Mrs. Cobb!” I began to tremble: the mere syllables of her name seemed like dreadful teeth, gnawing and crunching the flowers of my dream. “Oh, Henry! I’m so afraid! Perhaps, after all, she won’t let you —”

“She won’t be asked!” He towered up, strong and splendid enough to conquer a whole regiment of Mrs. Cobbs and Victors, too. Oh, how I admired him, how I loved him, how I wanted him! And he was mine — mine!

“Listen,” he said, “you’ll go to bed immediately, please. I’ll ask my mother to tell the people you have a bad headache and had to retire. Meanwhile I’ll just invite Mrs. Cobb into my private study and explain to her how the case stands.”

“Ah!” I looked at him, speechless at so much bravery. How differently he spoke from Victor an hour ago! He smiled at me.

“To get you, my beauty, my love, I’d fight Apollyon himself; so with the law on my side I think I can manage poor Mrs. Cobb. Of course, I’ll explain to her that every penny she has spent on you shall be refunded, down to these cursed wedding cards and the wedding cake itself, if she has ordered it. The wedding cake!—damn!



## HER WORD OF HONOR

— Excuse me, sweetheart, but I think I'm a little bit off my head, to-night !”

He stood staring at me with a kind of dazed look in his eyes, and I could see that nothing was farther from his idea, after all, than saying good night and letting me go. But the hour was growing late, our absence would be remarked, Mrs. Cobb would be coming for me to go home —

“ Henry,” I implored him, “ please get it over with. Go and find her at once —”

“ I'm going, dearest. So you authorize me to speak to her as your lawyer, of course? For, naturally, we say nothing of our marriage to-night. No, that comes to her as a glad surprise !”

“ As you like, dear Henry. You know so much better than I. Look how I have bungled my affairs all by myself, and have to leave you to get me out ! But at once, please !”

“ Very well, sweetheart. Look ! here's a door that you can go upstairs by, without passing all that crowd. I say, Fanny Carroll's a corker, isn't she? It's she that's kept the crowd away and given us this chance to talk. My precious one, my adored one ! For the last time that we shall have to say it to each other, good night !”

## HER WORD OF HONOR

He kissed me, opened the door, and I fled upstairs. The blood was pounding in my ears, my head seemed floating off in a kind of dim mist. Poor old G  nevi  ve, who had made all the luggage and who was sitting there among the valises waiting to be off, was amazed at my sudden appearance with the order to put me to bed where I had slept for the last two nights.

“I find myself a little unwell, G  nevi  ve. We have decided that, after all, it’s better that I sleep here to-night and leave in the morning.”

For G  nevi  ve, even though she’s a dear old thing, was not a person to be taken into my confidence. No, our beautiful plans should remain a secret between my well beloved and me, for a few sweet hours yet.

“Give me a peignoir, G  nevi  ve, and take down my hair.”

Ten minutes later, as I was lying on the sofa, and G  nevi  ve was bathing my forehead with Lily of the Valley water, I heard a light tap at my door. Was it Mrs. Stuart? Or was it Mrs. Cobb, forcing herself past Henry’s explanations, coming to demand me with all her natural violence? But — oh, I was not her stupid boy

## HER WORD OF HONOR

Victor to be bullied as she chose ! I had Henry on my side ; I had the law on my side ; and I was not afraid to stand up for my rights !

Meanwhile, G nevi ve was opening the door ; and to my surprise not one form but two sailed in, one in lilac, the other in pale gray. But above their immaculate dinner toilettes, Mrs. Stuart's face glowed a disfiguring crimson, Mrs. Cobb's showed an odd and livid white. Suddenly my heart, swelled with a joy and courage so immeasurable, shrank as it seemed to the size of a pin point. I heard Mrs. Cobb speaking, in a voice whose sweetness contrasted oddly with her drawn and excited look.

"Mrs. Stuart, I thank you more than I can tell for your kindness toward this dear child, even for that excess of goodness which fears the effect of her seeing me. But I can assure you your fears are groundless. Lili, my dear little daughter, how are you feeling now ?"

With the most affectionate air in the world, she came and knelt down by my sofa ; but the face she bent over me was so terrible that I closed my eyes.

"Better," I murmured ; "quite well now !"

## HER WORD OF HONOR

“My poor darling! All this excitement, this fatigue, has been too much for her. Mrs. Stuart, I think perhaps you were right, and the strain of seeing more than one person at a time may be too much for her. This poor little girl of mine! Yes, I think, Mrs. Stuart, that you were entirely right.”

At this turning against her of her own guns, I could see Mrs. Stuart blanch and bristle; but what could a creature gentle and sweet as she do against an embodied force like the woman who knelt over me? “Oh, stay! stay!” I wanted to cry out loud. But Mrs. Cobb’s eyes were on me, through my closed lids I felt them, and I dared not speak.

“Very well then, for five minutes!” I heard Mrs. Stuart say, in an irresolute tone. The next minute I heard the door close softly.

“Géneviève, are Mademoiselle’s trunks ready?”

The manner of this question, this contemptuous passing over of me and my possible wishes, roused my spirit. Throwing off my old nurse’s hand and the perfume-soaked cloth, I sat bolt upright with wide-open eyes.

“No, dear Mrs. Cobb. I have decided not to

## HER WORD OF HONOR

go home to-night, after all. You see, Mrs. Stuart has been so kind as to —”

“Géneviève, you may leave the room !”

Though Mrs. Cobb's French accent might leave some room for doubt, her gesture could not. The next moment we were alone. And Mrs. Cobb, having with cautious motions opened all the doors and peered without, came back to the sofa again. As for me, I remembered the tool-house in the garden and braced myself to fight for my rights. This indomitable woman should see at last that she had met her match !

But when she spoke, it was in a quiet, suppressed sort of voice.

“Lili, I can see that you're expecting me to make a scene, just as Mrs. Stuart expected when, an instant ago, with rather misplaced officiousness, she tried to prevent me from entering your room. I'm not going to make a scene, my dear child; so don't clench your fists and roll your big black eyes. I'm not going to remind you of the position in which, by your desertion of us in the eleventh hour, you place my son and me. We discussed that fully this afternoon. You know as well as I do the ruin that you're making;

## HER WORD OF HONOR

so we'll leave that topic alone. I have come merely to ask you: is it true, this story that I hear now from Henry Stuart, who tells me that he acts as your attorney?"

Before her violence, how easily I had defended myself! But this tragic gentleness cut the ground from beneath my feet, and my heart quivered to perceive the sudden ageing of her appearance. At the dinner table she had appeared, as usual, well preserved, discreetly powdered, almost young; but now — what an old, old woman bent her bitter face above me!

"So it's the provisions of the Contract Labor Law," she said, "that release you from your promise to me. Very ingenious, upon my word, and the idea reflects tremendous credit upon the legal astuteness of young Mr. Stuart! Only, you see, I never thought of being clever. If I had, I might have had articles properly drawn up after our arrival in New York, and regularly signed and sealed. In fact, I might have done so if I had picked you up out of the steerage, and engaged you as my cook; but, you see, I took you for a lady, and I didn't ask you to be my cook — I asked you to be my daughter —"



## HER WORD OF HONOR

It was not so easy, after all, to defend my side! But with feeble resolution I tried to parry some of her accusations, even unspoken:—

“I know,” I said, “that according to your part of the contract you have spent a great deal of money on me. That money, Mrs. Cobb, shall be returned to the last centime. And the jewels —” I began pulling at the huge solitaire still sparkling on my hand.

Her face burned a dull red, and I suddenly felt a new emotion — shame. Yes, in speaking of the money I had put myself in the wrong, and the very fact that she kept her temper before such an unnecessary insult served only to render my position more painful and more bewildering.

“No,” she said, “pay me back the money when I send my bill. Till then please remember that I’m a lady as well as your new friend Mrs. Stuart, though perhaps my blood is less blue. As for the things, keep them. What could I do with them? I don’t wear blue any more, my child, and I don’t wear pearls. And the diamond — keep that too, Lili, to remember Victor by; that is, if your new fiancé will let you. For I cannot doubt that the outcome of this clever

## HER WORD OF HONOR

trick will be you will marry Mr. Henry Stuart. All my congratulations to him and to his mother for the brilliant way they have played their cards! They've carried off the beauty of the season. And the Duchess, too, when she arrives — when she arrives for the wedding! The wedding — ah!” She caught her breath like a sob in her throat. “My poor Victor scorned and refused at the very altar! Thrown down publicly in the eyes of the whole world! Will he ever forgive me? Ah, Lili, between the two of us what a fool we have managed to make of my poor boy!”

She covered her face with her two hands and wept. And the bitterness of her heart broke from her in a sudden cry.

“Oh! it serves me just right for having trusted to a Frenchwoman!”

Ah! I jumped to my feet. Now, indeed, she had found words to flick me on the raw of my skin! Through the whirl of my exhausted spirit, a clear train of thought came suddenly forcing itself.

So I had imagined, had I, that, like the personages in those modern novels that my Uncle

## HER WORD OF HONOR

Porthaven at Brent forbade me to read, I had changed with my environment, made for myself a new character and a new standard of action? Because I found America charming and delightful, I thought I had become an American and forgotten France? I had left behind me in France, had I, all those worn-out traditions, all those moldy ideas of chivalry, that had brought more than one Vauquières to a perfectly unnecessary death, that quite needlessly had stripped my dear papa of his fortune and sent his daughter a penniless exile to wander over the earth?

Yes, I was an exile; but — the realization hit me in that instant like a stroke — I was still French, still a Vauquières. My hand went to my locket, which on its long thin chain hung at my neck. Yes, it was there, with its bombastic medieval motto, giving the lie to reason, to all practical modern ideas, to American law and its clear logical interpretation that so short a time ago had convinced my understanding. “*Vauquières tient parole!*”

On the one hand stood the image of Henry with love in his eyes, and his arms held out to me. On the other side, outside of reason, or logic, or

## HER WORD OF HONOR

law, was just my word — my word that I had given. What would papa tell me to choose if he were here? What had he chosen for himself? The law had not bound him; but he had kept his word! And I was a Vauquières, too.

Suddenly Mrs. Cobb broke the silence. “Lili,” she said in a voice so hollow and toneless that it sounded as though she were very far away or very ill, “as you notice I make no scene. I merely remind you of one fact that no legal quibble could alter, and it is this: you gave me your word of honor, and I accepted it. Now that the time has come, are you going to keep your promise, or are you going to break it?”

“*I am going to break it*” — no, my lips would not form the words: they choked in my throat; it seemed to me that papa was listening and I could not say them. I threw up my head. I dare-say my gesture was a little dramatic; but — oh, when my ancestors marched to their death, at least they were allowed a white panache and a drum!

“I am going to keep my promise since you claim it,” I said. “And now, Mrs. Cobb, as soon as G  nevi  ve has dressed me, will you please take me home?”

## CHAPTER XVII

NOW time moves forward a week — a miserable week. And Lili — miserable Lili — moves from Bar Harbor to New York.

For Mrs. Cobb it was an epoch of triumph. The wedding presents that so delighted her soul came pouring in from all quarters with cards that bore, I was told, the most aristocratic names in America. As to my own side of the ocean, my Vauquières uncles and aunts on this occasion of my marriage with a millionaire (though they refused to cross the ocean) came forward in a very fine fashion indeed. A beautiful emerald pendant (I look hideous in emeralds; but no matter — it came from Cartier's), a little gold repeater, a jeweled fillet for the hair — now that I had no need of anything any more, they spent their money royally for me. Ah! was Mrs. Cobb proud of these gifts, and did she arrange them where none could pass them by, — “Le Marquis et la Marquise de Vauquières de Clugny” —

## HER WORD OF HONOR

“Comte Dominique de Vauquières de Clugny” — “La Duchesse Donairière de Brochefort,” and so forth. As to Aunt Elizabeth, she was to bring her presents with her. It was to meet her that we went to New York.

She was to arrive with Uncle Porthaven and the three older girls (the younger ones were left at home at Brent) on the sixth of August. That evening there was to be a dinner and theater party in honor of the new arrivals, with a supper afterwards in the roof garden of the Waldorf. Then we were all to go at once to the *Brunhilda*, Mrs. Cobb's big steam yacht moored at her dock in the North River, and to start early the next morning for Mount Desert. Then the evening of the ninth there was to be a formal dinner of great magnificence at the villa at Bar Harbor, in honor of the Duke and Duchess. Then the next day, the wedding —

But I didn't think of that: I lived in a kind of dreadful dream, trying to let each minute suffice to its own pain, without thinking of to-morrow. I had done what was right. *Mon Dieu!* there could be no doubt of that since that was the reason I had done it. But just the same, I was



## HER WORD OF HONOR

tortured by romance, and by self-reproach, no less, perhaps, than if I had done what I wanted to. Wherever I went I was haunted by the image of Mrs. Stuart's face and of Henry's ghastly eyes, as, with head downbent, I had followed Mrs. Cobb from their house on that last terrible night.

What did they think of me? Would they ever understand or forgive me? I did not know, I had no word from them, — only a little, little letter from Henry, in which he informed me that in order to avoid certain coming events he was leaving Bar Harbor; and then, since in response to his telephone message of the other night a cabin had been reserved for him on the *Lorraine*, sailing for Havre on August 6, he had made up his mind to use it even under the altered circumstances and leave America for an indefinite period.

Ah, my dear, dear Henry — leaving his home, leaving America alone, without even his mother! Poor Harriet! I had repaid her badly indeed for all her kindness to me and for the long fidelity of her spirit. She sent me a beautiful wedding present, — a little gold writing table, style Louis XV, the exact reproduction, quite exact, of one that had belonged to papa. Yes, she remembered.

## HER WORD OF HONOR

She had loved too, poor Harriet; but no more than I had she been permitted to show her love and her fidelity by her actions. So I hoped she might understand and forgive me.

But when Mrs. Cobb and I in our limousine met her in her carriage in the promenade (I forget its name) above the sea, she gave me only a little pale nod before turning away her head. Ah! it was the mother in her that could not forgive me, I understood that; while the other mother by my side made a little satisfied noise in her throat like a hen clucking over her chicks. When I arrived home, I threw myself face downward on my bed and lay there for a long time; because it seemed to me that, if I moved or even thought, my heart must crack and break.

As to Victor, I am bound to own that in these days he behaved very decently; though now, as the wedding approached, he took toward me, in public, pompous airs of ownership that might have made me laugh — had they not made me crawl. Though when we were alone together, he spoke but little; and on our dash to New York on the yacht, when he was not in the pilot house or bullying the sailors, he sat for the most part

## HER WORD OF HONOR

silent and immovable, with his horrid little pipe between his teeth. In the deeds of the property that his mother was conveying him, he had exacted the *Brunhilda* as part of his share; and was already planning a wedding trip to the South Sea Islands. I didn't care, though the sea made me feel very ill most of the time. In those southern seas I know there are monsoons and typhoons and other monstrous winds that may do our business any day and the sharks finish us. The idea is a genial one — the only one of the kind I've had these latter days.

So we arrived in New York and went to the dock in an automobile (still another one, that Mrs. Cobb leaves in her city garage) to meet my family. According to the preliminary arrangement by cable, the Duchess had accepted the cabins de luxe offered by my future mother-in-law, and was arriving by the *Mauretania* with her husband and daughters.

On the dock, it was hot enough to roast chestnuts on top of our parasols. But there we had to wait three long hours in the sun; because, owing to a strike of the men who load the cargoes and freight and things like that on the steamers,

## HER WORD OF HONOR

there had been a delay in the last steamer sailing, and the poor *Mauretania* had to wait before she could get into her dock. Such mountains of boxes and barrels and bales of cotton as there were piled all around us, with the company's officers and policemen trying to push them about, and people scolding because their friends couldn't land, and Mrs. Cobb raving at the top of her voice, and threatening to sue the company — so that there could be no doubt in the minds of the other people around us, at least, that we had come to meet a Duchess. However, in spite of everything, the wait came to an end at last. Mrs. Cobb had a permit so we walked aboard. And there was Aunt Elizabeth!

It's all very well to criticise your relatives and make fun of them, and even run away from them; but your own blood, you know — that's something! And when you see your own people again in a foreign land, after not seeing them for a long time — why, a great lump comes into your throat, and when you feel their arms around you, you feel as though you had come home! When Aunt Elizabeth kissed me, it seemed to me that I had never been grateful to her or loved her

## HER WORD OF HONOR

enough. Then came Uncle Porthaven and the girls; as they crowded around me, kissing me and telling me how pretty I looked, and congratulating me on my fine marriage, why, in the joy of finding myself among my own again, I almost forgot for just a minute — almost, but not quite — the sore heart I carried. Ah, if all this fuss and these happy arrivals had been for my marriage with Henry!

However, I had little time to think. The customs men were coming up with their annoying questions, and the captain was paying his compliments to the Duke, and the passengers were edging up trying to say good-by to the Duchess, and getting frozen stares through an eyeglass. She looked just the same Aunt Elizabeth, with her old tweed skirt hitched up slightly in front, her large jacket with pockets like a man, and her little felt hat with a priceless veil of Chantilly about it. The girls, however, appeared very well. Portia in a gown of raspberry pink, Muriel in pale olive green, Ermentrude in white, slightly soiled as usual. Though their noses were still large, their complexions, after the American pallor, looked amazingly fresh and lovely. And



## HER WORD OF HONOR

as they huddled together in that frightened way of the English young lady of quality around their imposing mamma, it must be owned that they had a certain air of being somebody, that one does not see every day.

"So your new husband doesn't show yet, Lili?" said Aunt Elizabeth, looking about through her gold eyeglass.

"No, Aunt Elizabeth. You see, he — he felt a little shy about intruding on our first meeting. But he will call on you at your hotel this afternoon to pay his respects."

"Ah! Charmin' young man, I suppose?"

As Mrs. Cobb was listening, I could answer nothing less than "Oh, charming!"

"Hm! Millionaire, you said?"

"Yes, your Grace," interrupted Mrs. Cobb, fluttered as I had never seen her at this flesh-and-blood presence of a real Duchess. "On the morning of my dear boy's marriage I sign articles conveying to him property to the amount of twenty-five million dollars."

"Dollars! Why not pounds? How much is a dollar, anyway?"

"Four shillings and twopence, your Grace!"



## HER WORD OF HONOR

“Dear me! Why can’t you just make it the round four shillin’s, without stoppin’ every time to bother over that extra tuppence? William, how much *is* twenty-five million dollars in real money?”

Uncle Porthaven’s voice, usually so languid, took on tones of unaffected interest as he replied with the imposing figure, “Five millions sterlin’, my dear!”

“Ah, not bad! Not bad at all! And of this sum, I suppose a fittin’ portion will be settled by marriage articles on my dear niece. However, we will speak of that later. My dears, here is the gang plank. Be careful of the gang plank. Muriel, you are tocin’ in as usual! Portia, hold up your head!”

On the drive home in the automobile she confided to me that she had come to America with the intention of leaving the two elder girls at least behind her in America. To be sure, the idea was a painful one; but beggars couldn’t be choosers. There was no blinkin’ the fact that Portia had been out eight years and Muriel six, with no takers offerin’ but a curate or two, and a peer whose name was quite impossibly damaged

## HER WORD OF HONOR

through bein' lent too often to fly-blown ventures in the city.

"Money, my dear, much money, is what my poor girls must have, even if we have to resign ourselves to Americans. Your fiancé, now — hasn't he a great many friends among rich young men, my dear?"

So I delighted Aunt Elizabeth's heart, and made Portia, who was in the middle seat between us, beam from ear to ear, with the description of the half-dozen bachelors of unimpeachable name and immense fortunes who had accepted Mrs. Cobb's invitation to the theater party to-night and the return cruise on the yacht.

"The yacht!" repeated my aunt, with satisfaction. "Do you hear that, Portia? Much can be done on a yacht — much. Well, well, Lili, to think of my little wild French girl turnin' out so splendidly, after all!"

So we left them at the St. Regis, where Mrs. Cobb had retained a royal suite for the family. Her own house, opened only temporarily, was between the hands of florists and decorators for the evening's entertainment, and hence not in condition to receive guests of such august importance.

## HER WORD OF HONOR

Aunt Elizabeth, however, waving aside her apologies and explanations, seemed delighted with the hotel accommodations thus offered her. And, though she had done nothing as we crossed the city but make uncomplimentary remarks about the heat, the elevated trains, and the skyscrapers, still she seemed extremely pleased with the situation as a whole. Never indeed had I seen her so amiable.

“I congratulate you, Lili. You have done well for yourself. Your new mother-in-law, in spite of various little crudities, seems a thoroughly presentable person. If her son is only half as decent a sort, then he’ll do. And, after all, what does that matter, since he has the money? Five million sterlin’! Very decent, indeed. If my poor girls can only do as well, I shall be content. So now good-by till this evenin’, Lili. You’ve done very well indeed, and I approve you thoroughly. And — er — God bless you!”

She added this benediction as a rather superfluous thought after her own approval was given. And, jumping from the automobile with surprising agility for one of her weight, she gathered her daughters about her and swept into the hotel.

## HER WORD OF HONOR

Reporters, who had followed the limousine in hired taximeters, swarmed after her with their little notebooks. Uncle Porthaven, tall and imposing in his gray traveling suit and gray mustache, brought up the rear. Mrs. Cobb, looking after them as the hotel door swallowed them up, sank back on the cushions with a sigh of utter content.

“Every inch the Duchess, isn’t she! And to think she’s my guest — mine!” Then, after a few minutes’ silent rumination of so much bliss, she added, just like Aunt Elizabeth, “God bless you, Lili!”

After so many benedictions, I ought to have been happy, oughtn’t I? But — oh, He seemed to have ordained, the good God, that I should be the instrument of delight and satisfaction to every one except to those whose sorrow was my sorrow, and whose joy would have been my joy. And, knowing that they were sad, and sad for me, what good could I get from all the blessings in the world?

So, when we arrived home, I just pretended a headache, and locked my bedroom door for the afternoon. The weather was so oppressively hot my excuse was a believable one. So there

## HER WORD OF HONOR

in the safe shelter of my bedroom, I just threw myself on my bed and behaved more foolishly than I shall ever own even to myself.

For that my suffering was perfectly illogical and foolish I will never deny. Even one that has never tried, like me, to pin down her flighty feminine intellect on a sound philosophical basis, could have realized that. For, after all, what I was doing was by my own free will, was it not? So, having chosen to keep my honorable word, why could I not be satisfied with the consciousness of doing right and resign myself to the disagreeable things that right doing always brings? And in this case there were so many agreeable things besides! Why, then, did I look back, look back ever down the path by which I had come, and long to retrace my footsteps, and sigh? Sigh? That's not the word! Cry out loud, and kick the bed with my feet like a wicked child? My pillow was soaked in tears, my handkerchief was torn to shreds, my hands were covered with toothmarks where I had stuffed them into my mouth and bitten them to keep from crying "Henry! Henry!" aloud with all my force.

Ah, sad, sad hours!

## CHAPTER XVIII

**B**UT the will has its force too, when we know that what we have to do is something that must be done. So when G enevi ve came to dress me at six o'clock (we are to dine early, for the play afterwards), she found me very calm and collected, polishing my nails with the huge silver buffer that Portia brought me. So she dressed me most beautifully in a new frock, of course virginal white, all Valenciennes and convent embroidery, and with all my pearls. The pearls are as big as pebbles, and the rope hangs to my knees. Mrs. Cobb, I know, paid a fortune to have them so perfectly matched and in so short a time. Aunt Elizabeth, examining them later, held her breath for an awed instant, then burst out in ecstasies. From that moment she was Mrs. Cobb's sworn ally.

"You lucky girl, Lili!" said Muriel, with a slightly pinched expression.

While Portia, putting up her glass in imitation



## HER WORD OF HONOR

of her mamma, was good enough to add: "He's not at all bad, you know, your fiancé—for an American."

For Portia, as I knew, this was enthusiasm. And a few moments later, entering the ballroom that Mrs. Cobb had had transformed into a kind of garden, they exploded together into unrestrained applause:—

"Oh, I say, mamma, look at these orchids! They're not half bad, you know!"

"And this fountain playin' in the middle—odd taste; but still, for this warm weather, I must admit it's rather jolly!"

To their criticisms as to their praise, Mrs. Cobb listened with the same beatified smile. The decorations were, in fact, charming. Flowers covered the walls, interspersed with twinkling electric lights; while the fountain, with its floating lumps of ice and the electric fans playing overhead, gave an artificial freshness to the air. Every one, in fact, was brisk, gay, and in the best of spirits—even Lili. After all, as there were perhaps other people there who carried a sore heart under their smiles, need I take much credit to myself for that?

## HER WORD OF HONOR

The company numbered about twenty-five; all, as Mrs. Cobb had devoutly remarked, being the very quintessence of the Social Register, healthy, handsome, and with the nicest manners in the world.

The dinner was a great success. Aunt Elizabeth's present to me, a cashmere shawl that her late Majesty had presented to her, was duly displayed and admired. And the Duchess herself, though she exclaimed, "Well, really now, how very American!" to every new production of Mrs. Cobb's Paris chef as it was served, still gave indubitable signs of enjoying herself immensely. Best of all, the young man that Mrs. Cobb had placed by Lady Portia seemed much taken with the frosty charms of his neighbor. And, to tell the truth, never have I seen her look so well; with her hair actually arranged in the style, a little powder on her sunburned nose, and a pale blue dress that made her neck look as white as snow.

Aunt Elizabeth, having cross-examined Mrs. Cobb in an audible whisper, and having learned that the young man's two sisters had respectively become an Italian Princess and a French Mar-

## HER WORD OF HONOR

quise, and that he himself was undoubted possessor of who knows how many gold mines, railroads, and steamship lines, beamed on the interesting pair with the most happy augury. Uncle Port-haven told the gentlemen around him all about what was the matter with American politics, and applied himself with flattering energy to Mrs. Cobb's champagne. Even Victor, with whom Muriel coquetted in the giddiest way, woke up in a surprising manner; and as we rose from the table he actually proposed to his mother that instead of taking supper at the Waldorf roof garden after the play we should go to another, a new one, about twenty stories higher in the air, and where, as he phrased it, there was "something doing."

"I know what you mean!" says Muriel. "Oh, you naughty man, you!"

"Please, Lady Muriel, be careful! Don't give me away before Lili, you know!"

Yes, we appeared quite the model fiancés. In the most obliging way in the world I acceded to his change of project. But, after all, what should I have cared if he had proposed to take out the whole crowd of us in the *Brunhilda*, and knock in

## HER WORD OF HONOR

the bottom with an ax? Indeed, it's possible that this last idea would have pleased me best of all; for I heard a gentleman near me, discussing American strikes with Uncle Porthaven, tell him that owing to the strike of the wharf laborers, the *Lorraine* had not been able to sail this morning, and perhaps was not leaving her dock until the evening.

The *Lorraine*! Ah, Henry's ship! To go and make an end in the water in which he floated, to sink deep, deep down in the cool water from which he had plucked me once, and where he would now doubtless let me find the end I deserved — would it not be a happy termination to all my troubles, after all? However, I had not much time for these reflections. The automobiles were at the door, and with laughter, and much fluttering of lace cloaks, we all set out for the theater.

It wasn't a real play, after all, but a kind of *revue*, with songs and ballets and comedians that made every one laugh; though, to tell the truth, people seemed to laugh more at what they said themselves than at what was going on on the stage. The poor actors came and went quite

## HER WORD OF HONOR

unnoticed, while Aunt Elizabeth discoursed on the education of the American girl, and in the back of the next box Portia and the brother of the Princess put their heads together and whispered most absorbedly. Every one, in fact, was giggling, flirting, and calling pleasantries from one box to another, like a lot of children on a school treat.

And poor Henry, all alone, sailing out of the harbor at this moment, looking back — who could tell? — toward the city where Lili sat and amused herself without him.

However, there was one consolation, and that was, it didn't last long; for, having sat too long over dinner, we arrived in time only for the last act. So, when it was finished at last, with the same laughter we returned to the waiting automobiles; which, in less time than it takes to tell about it, had transported us to the new roof garden so highly recommended by my fiancé. Then, with the same dispatch, amid Aunt Elizabeth's grave rumble of remonstrance and Muriel's giddy little screams, we were whisked to the top by electric elevators that made the forty-five stories in half as many seconds, and gave you a funny feeling in the pit of your stomach.

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My head was still giddy as I stepped out in the roof garden — how different from what I expected. What a strange, strange place! An effort seemed to have been made to transform it into something human and natural. All about there was a jungle of tall, potted palms; and on a little stage arranged at one end a band of singers in toreador costume sent their voices ineffectually up against the stars.

How close they were, the stars! How sadly it sighed, the night wind whose freshness, after the sultry streets below, sent a little thrill to one's very bones! Yes, the place had a thrill in it, something that defied laughter as it defied reason, and left everyday life far away in the city beneath us. The occupants of the other tables, for the most part tired-looking business men with siphons of soda and bottles of whisky before them, seemed to feel the fantastic influence of the place as well as I. Even in our own merry party, the gayety had become suddenly veiled and vague. Portia and her devoted admirer whispered together. Aunt Elizabeth pursued her unending discourse on the American girl. Victor, who appeared much excited, ordered about the waiters



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and abused the performance on the stage. But otherwise conversation had lapsed strangely; while the harsh voices of the singers, mingled with the dry rattle of their wooden clappers, melted away mournfully into the hollow vault of the night. In fact, in this disquieting neighborhood of infinity the music was so far defeated from its original intention of gayety, that at the conclusion of the number the resulting silence almost restored its life to the withered conversation: to be nipped again, however, as five minutes later the little orchestra again uttered its preliminary wail.

Suddenly I saw Victor, who since our arrival here had seemed strangely excited, half rise from his chair and then sit down again. From his pink sunburned face the blood had ebbed, leaving it pale beneath its freckles. Following his eyes, I turned my head. There on the little stage before us, with her yellow head sharply silhouetted against the dark background of palms, stood Miss Fay Martin.

Cautiously I glanced round our grouping tables. No one besides Victor and me — so much was sure — had recognized the singer.

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Mrs. Cobb, deep in conversation with her new friend the Duchess, could not spare a glance to notice her beloved boy's agitation. The others, if they perceived anything amiss, naturally attributed any slight disorder to the champagne which the host, according to his genial custom, had absorbed freely during the evening. So I alone of all the company understood why our destination had been changed from the roof garden of the Waldorf to this other, where the air was higher and the entertainment so much more amusing; though certainly, if Victor had expected gratification either to his feelings or to his curiosity, one could read in his disturbed face that for his own enjoyment he had gone a bit too far.

On the stage Fay began her song. Though as a usual thing I can't understand English when it is sung, still her diction was very clear and sharp, like her voice. So the words came to me distinctly; sentimental words they were, all about some one who had given some one else a little silver ring and then the person had proved false and the first one was dying of a broken heart, and so on. It was evident that Victor understood the words, too; for his face changed from

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white to red, his very eyes changed color as though he were going to cry. Like a child watching a show of marionettes, he sat with his gaze fixed on the singer, and never noticed even when the waiter put lobster on his plate and filled up his glass with wine.

On the stage, I must own that the young singer made a sufficiently charming figure, with her blonde head shining against the dark background of palms. Her white dress, made high in the neck and with no trimming but a pink ribbon sash, gave her a very innocent, youthful sort of look, very different from the day she had come to inspect me at Bar Harbor.

Then I perceived one rather startling fact, — her large, shining eyes were fixed directly upon Victor, whose agitation, whether due to self-consciousness or to genuine emotion, was every moment increasing. And it was at him, directly to him out of all her languid or distracted audience, that she sang her woeful chanson, in a voice that ran with tears : —

“When I at last shall lie all pale amid the roses,  
I would that on my withering finger should be  
The little silver ring that once thou gavest me.”

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Thus the song came to its mournful end. On the last word, as she turned to leave the stage, she lifted her hand with a sudden passionate gesture and kissed the ring that sparkled upon it. The next instant she had vanished, followed by a little faint applause. And I heard Victor's voice, in a quick breath that was barely audible:—

“Good Lord! My ring!”

To do him justice, it wasn't any cheap little silver ring, but an enormous diamond, as large as mine or bigger. I glanced around. Not a soul but me had noticed the little interlude. With a sigh that seemed as though it would burst the buttons of his white brocade waistcoat, he turned to the lobster on his plate. But it was evident that the pathetic image conjured up by Fay's last words still followed him: he ate listlessly and had need of frequent recourse to the champagne. How I despised him at that moment, this man who was to be my husband!

Under the pleasing influence of supper, the conversation had taken a brisk reaction from the depressing neighborhood of the stars. At the little table that made the center of our group, Aunt Elizabeth was holding forth in a loud voice,

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just as she always did when we had people from Brentpool to dinner at the castle.

“Ermentrude, my dear, take some of the salad. It’s not half so nasty as it looks. But the lobster, though it’s fresh,—yes, it seems quite fresh,—is incorrectly cooked. You broil a porterhouse, my dear Mrs. Cobb; not a lobster. A lobster should be potted, with a great deal of melted butter, allspice, cloves, and pepper—much pepper. Portia, my love, you remember the excellent potted lobster that we ate at the little inn on the hill near Eastbourne last summer?”

For once in her life, however, Portia was too absorbed to answer her imposing mamma’s query; for the brother of the Princess, it was plain, had met his fate. His wine remained untouched in its glass, he leaned toward her with hypnotized gaze, drinking in her words as a good communicant accepts the *Bon Dieu*. A little pang that was half envy and half-sincere pleasure shot through my heart. Poor Portia! Had her unbounded aspiration at last brought its own fulfillment, had she found the man who should come offering her his heart and a fortune, too?

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All about me was that gay chorus made up of popping bottles and tinkling forks, of flirting and joking and laughter. On the little stage a new number had succeeded to the last, and the music added its merry accompaniment. Overhead were the silent stars — the same stars on which, perhaps, my dear Henry was gazing, as his boat slid out of the darkened harbor.

Suddenly at an unoccupied table near that which Victor and I occupied, a lady and gentleman came and sat down. Perhaps I shouldn't say a gentleman, either, — an elderly, tired-looking person with something of the air of the theater about him, who ordered only a glass of milk and sat sipping it as though counting the seconds between each two sips. But the lady, who was dressed in a long black satin wrap and a very correct little straw hat, took no refreshment whatever. Then all of a sudden I recognized her. It was Fay come back.

Victor had not noticed her. She fixed her eyes on him — large, luminous, imploring eyes — and waited.

Suddenly Victor turned as though he had been stung, and met her gaze full in the face. For an



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instant they remained staring at each other, while I watched them discreetly from beneath my lashes. Then, with a shuddering effort, as though heaving a weight far beyond his strength, Victor dragged his eyes away. But Fay's eyes never wavered.

On the stage her presence had had its startling, its moving effect on the man who, according to the limitations of his nature, undoubtedly loved her. But here close beside him, leaning toward him with parted lips and wide-open, shining eyes that alternately threatened and implored, — though no one but me seemed to notice the fact, — here at the highest moment of Mrs. Cobb's triumph, this insignificant little creature had come to measure swords with her. For without any metaphor it seemed an actual fact that those eyes held a sword. Never in any face have I seen so intense a concentration of the human will, focused, as it were, in the blade of light that streamed from those unwinking irises. "Come!" said the eyes. "I love you — come!"

Upon my word, I had to feel sorry for Victor. To be sure, he was hardly an ideal type, so much was certain, and governed, moreover, by motives

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purely mercenary. But he was human, just the same, and in that moment he undoubtedly suffered. Suffered! It was torments that he underwent, while his legs writhed themselves about those of his chair and his shaking hand returned continually to the champagne. And like his body, his head seemed 'galvanized into perpetual motion; turned sidewise to see if Fay were still looking at him, then jerked away like a tooth; then, as though by some irresistible law of nature, like the sunset or the tides, back went his eyes to hers — back, every time.

This little drama, which lasted perhaps ten minutes, seemed by its very intensity prolonged to as many hours. Then suddenly I beheld the tortured legs of Victor which quivered and then remained transfixed, like those of a smitten beast. Involuntarily I turned and looked. There in the brilliant eyes under the little dark hat, bent as ever upon Victor, had gathered two shining tears. Whether by art or by genuine emotion, the effect was perfect. Thus softened by sorrow, the eyes became of magical enchantment of irresistible seduction. "Come!" they said, "my beloved one, come!"

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Suddenly Victor leaped to his feet. "I'm damned," I heard him say under his breath, "if I can stand this any more!"

His chair, knocked away by his hasty gesture, fell crashing to the ground. From flirting, from bragging, or from laying down the law, the attention of all was suddenly reclaimed to him, as, stepping forward for half a dozen paces, he seized Fay by the hand.

"Come, Fay!" he said, in a voice so changed I hardly recognized it as his. "Mother, I'm going! Good-by!"

Had he suddenly gone mad and drawn a pistol, the commotion could hardly have been greater. The whole company leaped to its feet, in a clatter of overturned chairs and smashing wineglasses.

Ermentrude, like the goose she is, began to scream: "Oh! Is it a fire?"

Mrs. Cobb, pale and immovable in her place, called her son's name. "Victor! Come here!"

Victor turned; but, sustained by the adoring beams of those eyes that had vanquished him, he found for the first time in his life strength to defy even those steely orbs which from infancy had commanded his obedience. For the first time

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since I had known him I am bound to own that he appeared admirable, and that I admired him. Force had come into his slouching shoulders, fire into his eyes. He held up his head and answered his mother like a man :—

“No, mother, I will not!”

Mrs. Cobb uttered a shrill scream. And, forgetful of the Duchess and of the august company that she had gathered to meet her, she darted forward and seized her rebellious son by the hand. Fay, still holding the other, stood modestly with her conquering eyes downcast.

“Victor, you have drunk too much. Drop that girl’s hand at once, and let me take you home!”

Unmindful of their manners in the desperate interest of the scene thus enacted before them, Mrs. Cobb’s guests crowded close in a ring, jostled each other’s shoulders, even climbed on chairs for a better view. Around us there was no noise but their strained breathing, together with the monotonous music from the stage, and the occasional clink of glasses from the other tables. Victor shook off his mother’s hand as though it had been a butterfly.

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“No, mother, my mind is made up. I can’t stand this any more. Lili doesn’t want to marry me, any more than I want to marry her. Here’s the girl I want for my wife — and, by God, I’m going to have her !”

There was something terrible, — the two faces, of mother and of son, stamped not only in the same image but in the same mask of tragic rage and of bitter resolution, and turned against each other. Mrs. Cobb spoke first, in a choked voice.

“You desert me, your mother? You desert Lili? You marry this — this person? Victor, you know the consequences !”

Her son’s voice seemed the echo of hers, identical in tone as in intensity. “Keep your money — that is, my father’s money! You’ve treated me like a child long enough! Now I’m a man, and, by Heaven, I’ll take a man’s rights! I guess I can work for my wife as well as the next fellow. Will you marry me without a penny, Fay?”

For answer she clung to his arm. Yes, perhaps she loved him, after all; for what else but love could have worked that miracle, could have pierced that dull hide of egotism and self-indulgence,

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have galvanized that inert hulk into life, could have made of Victor Cobb, as he himself said, a man?

I wanted to clap my hands in pure admiration, to shout "Bravo, Victor!" after him, as, still holding Fay by the hand, he walked resolutely away toward the elevator. His mother, as though turned to stone, stood gazing after him with anguished eyes.

"Upon my word!" I heard a voice mutter somewhere near me, "one has to admire the fellow, after all!"

"Right you are!" I wanted to cry out in response. But a sudden thought came to me and took my breath. Since of his own free will Victor had abandoned me, I was free — free to go to Henry.

Ah, Henry, my dear, dear Henry! The thought of him in that instant was too much for me, and I began to cry.

Instantly and from all quarters there was a rush of consolation toward me. From the deserting bridegroom, attention was at once recalled to focus itself upon the deserted bride.

"Ah, poor little thing!" — "Dear Made-



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moiselle, try to control yourself!" — "Poor little creature, what a tragedy for her!" — While somewhere in the immediate background I heard Aunt Elizabeth's voice booming majestically: —

"I have heard much, Mrs. Cobb, of the disobedience of American children; but I must say, your son —"

While Portia's voice, thin and correct, in my ear: "There, don't cry, poor Lili! It's really too distressing! I pity you with all my heart!"

But through the compassion of her words struck a note of secret pleasure that I understood, — in a few short hours had not our positions, according to all human probability, been precisely reversed? And Portia was pitying me, triumphing over me! The idea was too ridiculous, and I burst out laughing. Then, somehow, the laughter got tangled up with the tears, and when I tried to stop laughing, I found that I couldn't. But the absurd part of it was, all the time I was laughing for sheer happiness. Henry, Henry! I was free to go to you at last.

So the hubbub around me increased. "Poor little thing! She has hysterics, and no wonder!" — "Here's my vinaigrette." — "No, cold water

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is better !” Then severe, scolding voices, of very knowing persons : “ Mademoiselle, you are acting like a fool ! Stop that noise immediately !” Then, helpless, distressed voices : “ Maid ! Waiter, send a maid !”

## CHAPTER XIX

NOW there at last was a sensible idea; for I knew that if I could only get away from all this noise and eyes staring at me, I should be well again directly. So the maid came, — a nice, fat, important-looking person who immediately took my arm. And it was really too ridiculous! The old gentleman who took my other arm, — a kind old colonel with white mustache, a great friend of Mrs. Stuart's, who had a moment ago murmured his applause of Victor — well, this time he murmured again, quite in my ear: —

“Come, come, my pretty little lady! Your sensibility does you great credit; but you really don't expect us to believe that you feel quite so badly as that?”

I almost laughed out loud. And, sure enough, as soon as the maid had put me on the dressing-room sofa, and left me quiet for a moment, like the sensible person she looked, then my tears and my gasps ceased as if by magic. For a few mo-

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ments I lay supine, like a tortured beast that has just thrown off its load; content to exist, and no more, in the realization that my terrible burden was no longer strapped to my shoulders, that Lucia's dagger could never be needed any more, that I was free to love Henry with my whole heart and to let him love me. I sprang to my feet. An idea had come to me.

I fairly shrieked for the maid.

She turned back from the window. "You are better, Miss?"

"Yes, yes!" My hand trembled on the gold bag on my wrist, and I drew a bill from it at random. "Look! Would you like five dollars?"

Her hand closed on the money like the snap of an automaton. She whispered, "Is it a word you want carried to one of the gentlemen, Miss?"

"No, no! Just take me downstairs and find me my wraps and put me into a taxicab. At once!"

So downstairs in one of those breath-taking lifts we fell, as one falls down a well. Perhaps, after all, the *Lorraine* had not yet left her dock! They had said, at table, her sailing was delayed until this evening. Ah, those blessed strikers!

## HER WORD OF HONOR

Who knows? If they had been obstinate enough and violent enough and wicked enough, perhaps they had prevented the steamer from taking on her cargo and sailing; perhaps, I might be in time to keep Henry from going away, after all!

Downstairs in the hall there were cruel delays, incredible delays, before the maid could find my little satin cloak. I should have gone at once without it; but in my white lace dinner dress, with its hanging festoons of pearls, I noticed that people stared at me as though I had escaped from the Jardin des Plantes. Besides, it was late, nearly one o'clock, and I didn't want to make poor Henry ridiculous, arriving to search for him — if he was still there — looking like a wild creature.

But at last the cloak was found and wrapped around me. Then more delays, maddening delays, for a taxi. Then, finally — ah, that wild dash through the sultry streets of the city, behind a chauffeur trying to earn a ten-dollar tip by arriving at the dock of the French Line in ten minutes — and with a volcano in my heart!

As we turned in at the entrance of the long wharf shed, suddenly I heard the hoarse blast of

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a steamer's whistle. Ah, I knew what that meant! The chauffeur shouted to a man leaning against a pile of packing cases, a rough-looking fellow with the look of a striker.

"Say, has the *Lorraine* left yet?"

The fellow replied with a sullen stare, "No, curse her, she ain't!"

Oh, dear, kind striker, led by Heaven, I owed this good fortune to you! Opening my bag again, I tossed the man a bill, just to relieve the joy of my heart. Behind me, I heard the horn of another late comer's automobile. For a moment I hesitated. The warehouse was so long, there were so few lights, so many people! Where should I go to find Henry? With blind resolution, I precipitated myself in the direction whence the whistle had come. Suddenly I heard a voice behind me:—

"Lili, Lili!"

I turned. It was Mrs. Cobb.

The sight of her, which had never pleased me too sincerely, had perhaps never been so unwelcome to me as at that instant. But for mere decency I had to check my flying steps and wait for her to catch up with me. Her eyes were wild,



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her bare shoulders uncovered but for a little lace scarf. I flung out my hand violently : —

“No, it’s no use coming for me ! I won’t go back !”

She seized my hand in both of hers. And together we sped down the dim, interminable length of the wharf shed ; while Mrs. Cobb, gasping for breath, let fall questions and answers that were no more than half intelligible.

“Lili, my poor child ! You crazy child, to come here alone ! It was the Duchess insisted that I should come after you. And I wanted to see you myself, dear, you understand that, and explain. That wretched boy ! The Duchess is quite furious ; she talks of a breach of promise suit and all sorts of things. My darling child, can you ever forgive me, and make the Duchess forgive me ?”

“Hurry, hurry ! But, dear Madame, how did you know where to find me ?” It was really too vexatious ! I boiled with wrath as I tugged her puffing bulk along beside me. Again the steamer’s whistle roared. After all, should I be too late ?

“It was when we sent to the dressing-room and

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found you gone, my dear, gone! I'm bound to own, everybody smiled and said: 'She's gone to find poor Henry Stuart — bully for her!' And that nice old friend of Mrs. Stuart's — Colonel Appleby, you remember him? — he said: 'Mrs. Cobb, take a taxi and drive at once to the dock of the French Line. If the *Lorraine* hasn't sailed yet, I think we can eat that wedding cake, after all!'"

"Hurry, hurry!"

In another moment — ah! thank the *bon Dieu!* we emerged from behind a pile of accumulated cargo into a blaze of electric light. At the foot of a gang plank stood a group of men in uniform; porters and sailors came and went. Before me rose the high, black wall of a ship's side. My heart leaped as though it would burst.

"Monsieur!" I rushed to the group in uniform. "Monsieur, I wish to speak with Monsieur Henry Stuart, a passenger on this ship. Where can I find him, please?"

The oldest and most important-looking surveyed me up and down gruffly. "The ship is just sailing. Besides, the passengers are all asleep. Is it very important?"

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Ah! he was a Frenchman, of course. I had forgotten that. Quick as a flash I changed to the tongue that was his as well as mine. "Monsieur! for the love of God send for him! It's a matter of life and death. No, you understand — more than life and death!"

His weary face relaxed in a smile, he looked from me to Mrs. Cobb, in her lace and sparkling jewels, then back to me again.

"Mademoiselle, there's only one thing more important than life and death; I remember that, even I!"

Then he turned with a quick order to a subordinate at his side, who dashed off at the word: —

"I am sorry it is too late to invite you on board, Mesdames; but in a few moments you shall see Mr. Henry Stuart if they can wake him."

Mrs. Cobb, with her hand pressed to her heaving bosom, sank down on one of the packing cases with which the wharf was encumbered. As for me, the blood roared in my head. In a few moments I should see him again! How would he greet me? For my base desertion of the other day had he forgiven me? Did he still —

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Across the scudding whirl of my thoughts broke the voice of Mrs. Cobb.

“Oh, Lili, Lili, what shall I do? Do you think that I ever, ever shall see him again?”

I turned toward her with a start. *Him!* But of course she meant Victor! And my heart was smitten with sudden compassion as I saw how old she looked under her tiara, how tired and grief-smitten and desperate.

“Oh, Lili, there’s no use talking, he did look noble when he stood up and defied me. Yes, just as stubborn as me, every whit, a real chip of the old block. Everybody said so. Yes, Lili, it’s the strangest thing, but every one seemed to admire him. You see, it was plain to be seen that he threw you down, not you that went off and jilted him. Yes, my boy seemed to make quite a hit — that is, with every one except the Duchess. And I think that perhaps she would forgive me if she thought that you were going to make a good marriage with some one else, after all.”

My heart leaped to pain. “Hush, who knows? So you are going to forgive Victor, after all?”

She made a gesture of desperation. “Who would have thought he’d have made such a hit?”

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And besides, he's my boy — my only bo-oy. That little rat of a girl — it's hard to take her in. But, after all, if she really loves my bo-oy —"

Ah! Mrs. Cobb's iron will, meeting with its match at last, had to buckle and bend like that of any other loving woman. And then, as she said, Victor had made such a hit! So he wouldn't have to swing to that strap that he hated so, after all. I was glad; for when your heart is running over with happiness, it is nice to think that other people are going to be happy, too.

"Then you'll speak to the Duchess, dear Lili? If only she could be prevailed on to come to Bar Harbor, after all!"

"I'll speak to her myself — or, no, if you'll give me a card, I'll write her a line that you can send her. This very night, immediately."

I thought of Portia and smiled. Small danger that the trip to Mount Desert, with such alluring prospects, would be refused!

"You'll come too, dear Lili, of course? You'll be a daughter to me just the same?"

"Lili!"

It was Henry's voice. Tall and pale in the electric light, he came tearing down the gang

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plank. He did not kiss me, though I should not have minded if he had. He just seized my two hands in both of his and held them tight as though he'd grind them to powder.

"Lili, what does this mean? What has happened?"

"Oh, Henry, I'm free! I've come to find you. I'm free, Henry. Oh, Henry, don't go away!"

"What?" he said in a dazed way, like a child suddenly waked from sleep.

I tried to tell what had happened; but got things all mixed up. Mrs. Cobb kept putting in explanations and defending Victor, whom no one, be sure, was accusing.

But Henry never listened to a word she said. He never glanced near her. He kept looking at me as though his eyes would drink me up, and holding my fingers as though his flesh would enter into mine.

"You beautiful creature! You radiant star, dropping down out of the night! You mean you've come to me, to belong to me? You're mine now — mine, *mine*?"

"Yes, Henry, yes, with my whole heart, if you want me!"



## HER WORD OF HONOR

He straightened himself with a violent effort, as though to shake off the daze that held him, while the desire of my heart rushed into my lips in a cry : —

“ Oh, Henry, don’t go away ! Oh, Henry, stay with me ! ”

He took a long breath. “ No, Lili, I can’t stay now ! ”

Pain shot through my heart like a knife ; for I could see he was himself again, wide awake, eager and practical. He refused me ? He refused me ?

In his eyes shone the light of a sudden resolution. “ No, Lili, I’m not going to stay, because you’re coming with me ! ”

“ Oh, oh ! ” I could only gasp. While I heard Mrs. Cobb’s voice protesting : —

“ Mr. Stuart, are you crazy ? She cannot go without any chaperon. And, besides, she has no things ; the steamer’s on the point of sailing — ”

He continued to address me as though Mrs. Cobb’s voice were that of a noisy child : —

“ Listen, sweetheart ! I’ll go to the captain and ask him to delay the sailing for another hour or so. My firm is counsel for the French Line.

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I think they'll do that much for me. Besides, he's a Frenchman, and when he hears that it's for a wedding —"

"A wedding, Mr. Stuart?"

"Oh, Henry, a wedding?"

My head turned round. I began to laugh out loud, I own it, like a child who sees bonbons.

"Oh, Henry, Henry!"

He swept on: "Come, darling, we'll rush and take a taxi and find a minister who'll marry us immediately; or, if they're all asleep, then a justice of the peace, whatever we find. Then, after we arrive in France, we'll be married again as much as you and your family please — though United States law is good enough for me, even if it isn't for you."

Mrs. Cobb uttered a little protesting scream. "But you crazy children!" she cried, "you can't be married at this hour! Where's your license?"

Henry stopped short, looking at her in that keen, serious way I like. "Don't be afraid for this dear child, Mrs. Cobb," he said, with determination. "I'll ask you to remember that I'm a gentleman — and what's more, I'm a lawyer too. A license isn't necessary for the legality of a marriage, of that I can assure you."

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Henry, leaping forward in that quick way in which he does everything, made his request to the captain. Ah! he is important, Henry. I could see that, even if I had doubted it before; because here out of that great individual, the commander of a ship, he was able to get what he wanted.

“An hour, then. But an hour, sharp, Mr. Stuart!”

“An hour, Captain, on the dot!”

And, seizing my arm, Henry began hurrying me down the long, shadowy wharf shed.

Mrs. Cobb, clutching her lace cloak around her, puffed after us. Though her insistence was vexatious, still I knew I must be grateful for it. She did her best to be a mother to me, poor Mrs. Cobb! “Then why do people ever bother about licenses at all, Mr. Stuart?” she panted, with a flash of her accustomed shrewdness.

Hurrying along, he replied with careful deference:—

“Because the law demands them, Mrs. Cobb, and it’s certainly better to have one if you’re not in a great hurry like Lili and me. A clergyman who performs a marriage without a license is liable to a fine if he’s informed on — but if you’ll promise not

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to be the informer, dear Mrs. Cobb, I can guarantee that Lili and I won't! — and in any case, I'll leave him a check that'll pay his fine six times over. And fine or not, the marriage is a marriage just the same. Do you hear that? The marriage holds! — Hurry, my darling, hurry!"

How different it looked from a moment ago, now that I was no longer alone! I cried: —

"Oh, Henry, I am so ashamed of the other day! And yet, what else could I do?"

"Cruel, wicked Lili! I'm glad you are ashamed. No, a thousand kisses will not be enough to pay for that desertion! Do you know that night when I found you gone, I came very near putting a bullet through my brain? And my poor mother, too! I never saw her so overcome! It seems she was very much attached to your family in France. This will make her happy! Ah, dear mother — if she were only here with us now!"

The automobile was still waiting there, with the taxi winding up. But who cared for that? Off we flew.

An hour later, in the same motor, back we dashed again down the same empty street. An

## HER WORD OF HONOR

hour, that was all — one little hour, so short a time to change two lives into one and earth into heaven.

The steamer was still there, after all.

So my husband took me home — my husband that I had traveled so far to find and found at last. And I had found him, after all, in the most stupid, blundering way in the world, all by chance and blind accident — I, who prided myself on my intelligence and my philosophy !

Ah, my poor philosophy ! What is it, after all, but a pale fabric of sad dreams, pieced together to console us when we can't get what we want ? And when we once get that, where's the use of speculating about it ? Who wants philosophy when she has love ?

THE END









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